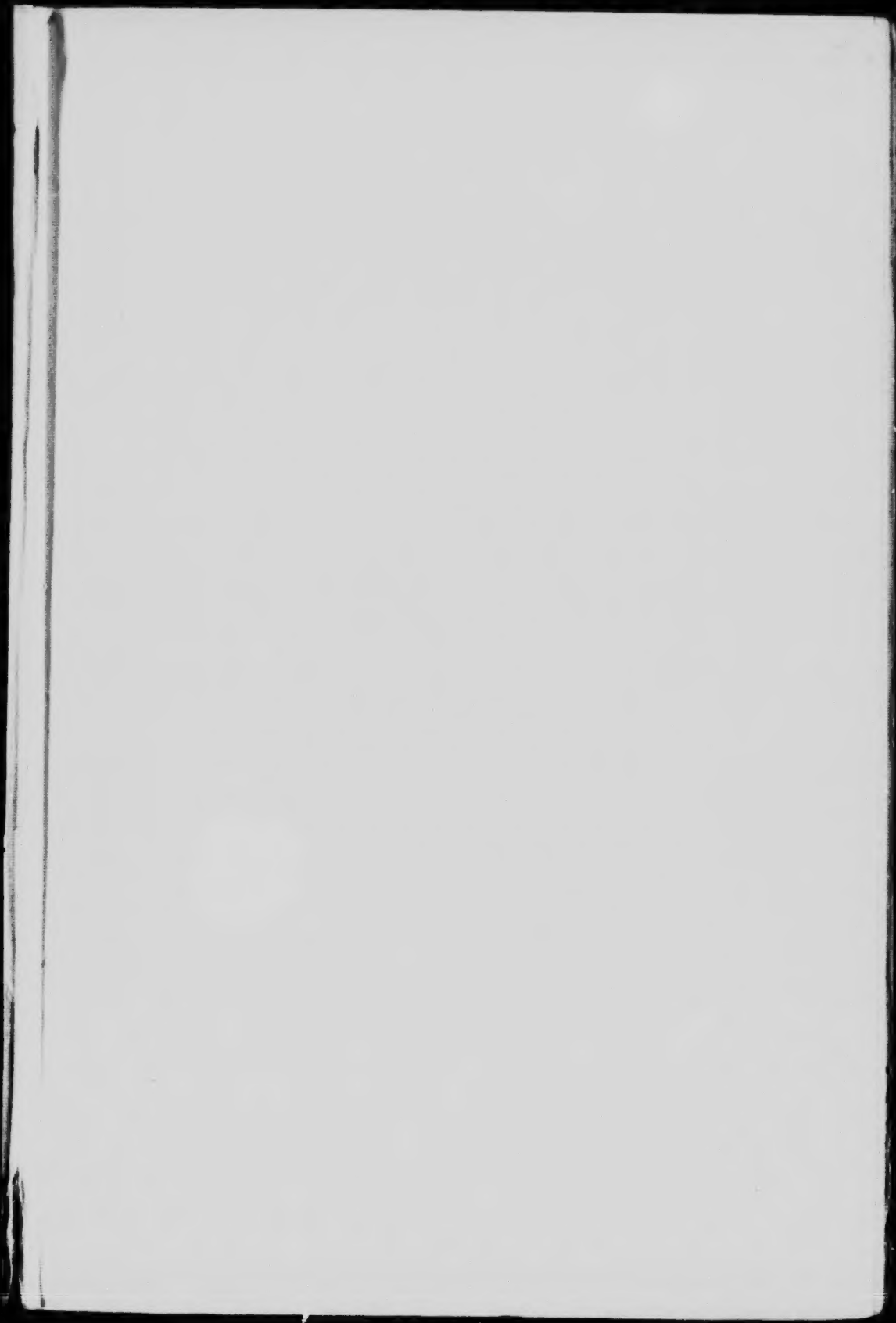




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THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

**OTHER BOOKS
BY CHARLES WAGNER**



*The Simple Life, The Better Way, By the Fireside, On
Life's Threshold, My Appeal to America*

THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

By

CHARLES WAGNER

Author of The Simple Life

Translated by Cleveland Palmer

Toronto

WILLIAM BRIGGS

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I AM A VOICE

READINGS

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. John : x, 27.

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Isaiah : lviii, 1.

The voice said, Cry. And he said what shall I cry ? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field : . . . the grass withereth, the flower fadeth : but the word of our God shall stand forever. Isaiah : xl, 6, 8.

This is my comfort in my affliction : for thy word hath quickened me. Psalms : cxix, 50.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater : so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth : it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Isaiah : lv, 10, 11.

PREFACE



PREFACE

A*T the instance of friends who for a long time have urged me to do so, I have attempted to reproduce in this volume a few sermons chosen at random. Written from memory, they will bear, no doubt, but a vague resemblance to the originals ; but they will at least fix their memory. As I have worked, I have thought of my dear auditors, and of so many happy moments that we have passed together under the eye of God, our souls filled with those high truths that have dominion over our fragile lives.*

With the hours of suffering and toil, I regard the hours of meditation and of adoration as the summits of human existence. Between the two, in spite of their great difference, there are close ties. Adoration gets inspiration from practical life and practical life gets inspiration from adoration. If public worship, if preaching has any aim, it is to blend into one, all

prayer and toil, it is to help us to live by casting light upon our way, by interpreting our experiences, by teaching us to unravel the divine woof in the rude stuff of the way of this world.

For this, it is enough to bring together these two things : the Gospel and life. Life would be very obscure without the Gospel ; but how the Gospel grows in strength and in stature in contact with life!

How many times, while preparing Sunday's sermon, have I not walked the busy streets filled with hastening crowds, with the sounds of toil or of idle vanities, hearing at every step, in the murmur of men and of things, the words of the text I was meditating, vibrate within me. This text, once in possession of my thought, found everywhere the most varied and unexpected commentaries. It found illustrations in scenes of popular life, in words fallen from the conversation of passers-by. I saw it glare from the posters on the walls, leap up in sparks under the hoofs of horses, ring under the hammer of the blacksmith: the stones of the highway cried it aloud to me.

Truth must indeed be powerful to have so many mysterious connivances. Never is the Gospel more beautiful or does it appear more true, than when the

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facts assume the burden of preaching it all by themselves. Never is sorrow more holy, activity more touching, evil more ugly, than when a ray of the Gospel chances to fall upon them.

I have sincerely striven to draw from these two equally inexhaustible well-springs, and I should esteem myself happy, if some companion in misery and hope might receive by my means, a little of that living water that makes us love life better and fear death less.

Paris, July, 1896.



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I AM A VOICE

READINGS

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I AM A VOICE*

I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord. John : i, 23.

NOTHING is rarer than a personality. So many causes both interior and exterior, hinder the normal development of human beings, so many hostile forces crush them, so many illusions lead them astray, that there is required a concurrence of extraordinary circumstances to render possible the existence of an independent character. But when, God alone knows at the cost of what efforts and of what happy accidents, a vigorous and original personality has been able to unfold, nothing is rarer than not to see it degenerate into a mere personage. History teaches us that men exceptional in will and energy, almost always become obstructive and mischievous. They commence by serving a cause and end by taking possession of it so com-

* In the French version of the Scriptures it is "a voice," and it is necessary to retain this reading in order to render precisely Pastor Wagner's thought in the following sermon.—*Trans.*

pletely that, from its servants, they become its masters. Instead of being men of a cause, they make the cause that of a man, and they degrade the most sacred realities to the paltry level of their ambitious egoism.

Thus, when we meet with strong natures, endowed with the secret of leadership and command, yet able to resist the subtile temptation to which so many of the finer spirits have succumbed, it behooves us to bow and to salute in them a greatness before which all that it is customary to call by that name fades into nothingness.

IF ever soul encompassed this greatness, it was that of John the Baptist. John is little known. Of him there remain only a few traits of physiognomy, and a few snatches of discourse. But these snatches are full of character, these traits possess a sculptural relief. Just as with broken trunks of columns, with fragments of stones, all that is left of temples that were once the marvels of ancient art, they enable us to conceive of the grandeur of the whole edifice to which they once belonged. John was at once strong and humble, energetic and self-detached. Never has an individuality

so well-tempered been less personal. Identifying himself completely with his role as precursor, he found perfect happiness in effacing himself in the glory of Christ, just as the dawn disappears in the splendours of the morning.

History is full of precursors who impede and withstand those whom they had first announced. When the time comes to retire and to give way to those for whom they have prepared the way, they do not have the courage to sacrifice themselves. They go on forever, and often become the worst enemies of the cause they have defended. John knew nothing of these failings which are the perpetual scandal in the development of the kingdom of God. Not only did he say, speaking of Jesus: "He must increase, but I must decrease," but he made all his acts conform to these words.

"This my joy is therefore fulfilled," he said, as he dwelt upon the first advances of the Gospel, and he expressed thus a sweetness of sacrifice forever unknown to personal souls that remain vulgar in spite of their genius.

Finally, John described himself metaphorically in that inimitable prophetic speech which ex-

plains in full the idea that he formed for himself of his ministry. Under the sway of a morbid curiosity, the crowd, more perplexed by the appearance of the worker than attentive to the work, pressed him with questions. Who then art thou, mysterious preacher? Art thou one of the old prophets of Israel, escaped from his rocky tomb? Or art thou perchance He whom we await? No, answered John, I am neither one of the prophets nor the Messiah himself, I am no one: *I am a voice!*

I AM a voice! This is not a formula that sums up the vocation of the prophets solely, or of all those who, in the pulpit or in the tribune, by the pen or by the public discourse, exert an influence upon their contemporaries. These words are addressed to every one. They define for every man, the humble yet great duty of truth that he is called to fulfil in his sphere and according to the measure of his ability. At the epoch in which we live, such a device is so applicable to the time being, so pressing, so needful for us to hear, that it is wise to engrave it in the very foreground of our consciousness.

TO become a voice, *we must begin by keeping still.* We must listen. The whole world is a tongue of which the spirit is the meaning. God engraved its fiery capitals in the immensity of the heavens, and traced its delicate smaller letters on the flower, on the grass, on the human soul, as rich, as incommensurable as the abysses of space. Whosoever you are, brother, before letting yourself utter one word, lend your ear to that voice that seeks you, I might almost add, that implores, you. Listen! — Listen to the confused murmur that arises from the human depths, and that, comprising in it all tears, all torments, as well as all joys, becomes the sigh of creation.

Listen in your heart to remorse, the sad and poignant echo that sin, traversing life, leaves everywhere upon its passage. Shut your ear to no sound, however unobtrusive, however sad, it may be. There are voices that issue from the tombs, others that call to you from out the abyss of past ages; repel them not, listen! One and all, they have something to say to you.

But do not be content with listening to man.

Pierce nature, and, in visible creation as in the invisible sanctuary of souls, watch attentively for the revelation of Him whose eternal thought every living thing, humble or sublime, translates after its own fashion. He speaks to you in the dark nights and in the bright light of dawn, in the infinite radiance of the worlds beyond all reckoning, and in the humble stalk that awaits, in the valley bottom, its ray of light and its drop of dew. Listen! — If there is anguish in the voice of poor humanity, there are in great nature, profound words of soothing, of hope. Look at the flower in the fields, listen to the birds in the skies! After the distressed voices that perturb you, you shall know the voices that relieve and console. There shall befall you that which befell the nun whose memory is preserved for us in the old legends. Listening to the forest voices she had gone, following them always, as far as the thick solitudes where nothing any longer comes to trouble the collected soul. There, in the shade of a tree where she had seated herself, she heard a song till then unknown to her ears. It was the song of the mystic bird. This song said, in marvellous modulations, all that man thinks and feels, all that he suffers, all that he seeks, all that falls

short of fulfillment for him. It summed up in harmonies the destinies of living beings and the immense pity that is at the root of things. Softly, on light, strong wings, it lifted the soul to the heights where it looks upon reality. And the nun, her hands clasped, listened, listened without end, forgetting earth, sky, time, forgetting herself. She listened for centuries without ever growing tired, finding in the song that charmed her, a sweetness forever new. Dear and truthful image of what the soul experiences when, mute, as respectful as a child, and as ready of belief, it listens in the universal silence to the voices that translate for it the things that are eternal!

ALL those who have become voices have travelled this way. At Patmos or in the desert, on Horeb or on Sinai, they have trembled with fright or started with joy. But everything has its time. There comes a day when all voices, soft or terrible, that man has heard, grow still to let henceforth only one be heard, which cries to him: "Go! go now and be a witness of the things you have heard! Go! I send you forth as lambs among wolves! Go! I send you towards men whose

brow is harsh, whose heart is wicked, but fear nothing, I shall embolden your face, I shall give you a heart of brass and a forehead of diamond."

When that moment has come, one must, in order to remain faithful to his mission, remember *that after all he is only a voice*. Truth does not belong to us, it is we who belong to truth! Woe to him who possesses it and treats it as something that belongs to himself. Happy is he who is possessed by it! No preference, no kinship, no sympathy counts here. Alas! it is not thus that men understand it. It is for this reason that they degrade truth and that it becomes without power in their hands. Instead of winging its way heavenward in vigorous flight, it crawls along the earth, like an eagle whose wings have been broken. Nothing is sadder than to see how those who ought to lend their voice to truth, turn it to their own uses and play with it. The voice, human speech, that sacred organ, whose whole worth lies in sincerity, has in all ages been the victim of odious profanations. But in this age it is more than ever attainted. The evil from which it suffers is defilement.

AT certain epochs a word was as good as a man. It was an act total, supreme, guaranteed by the whole of life. There was no need to sign, to stamp, to legalize. Speech was held between friends and enemies alike, more sacred than any sanctuary, and man maintained it, with the obscure but just sentiment that it is at the base of societies, and that if words lose their value, there is no longer any society possible. Later the written word was considered sacred. And coming nearer to our own day, we have been able to see the masses, guided ever by that quite legitimate sentiment of the holiness of speech, regard everything printed as gospel truth. Those times are no more. We have lied too much, by the living word, the pen, and the press. We have said and printed too much that is light, false, wittingly disfigured. Armed with an instrumentality that multiplies thought and spreads it broadcast to the four corners of the earth with a rapidity unknown to our fathers, we have made use of it, for the most part, to extend slander more widely and to cause a greater amount of doubtful intelligence to swarm upon the earth. So well have we spun speech out in all our mouths, so thoroughly have we deprived

it of its proper nature and caused it to become sophisticated, that it is no longer of the least value. The confidence of the masses in authority, which is one of the slowest and most difficult conquests of humanity, we have lost like a thing of no worth. They no longer say to any one who now lifts up his voice: Who are you? But: What end have you in view? What party do you serve? By what interest are you led? By whom have you been bought? That there may be a sacred truth, loved, respected, adored; a truth that is worth more than life, to which one may give himself wholly and with happiness,—this idea diverts the cynics and makes those whom the cruel experiences of life have rendered distrustful, shake their heads. If ever an epoch has needed to rehabilitate human speech, it is our own. What good are we if it is good for nothing, since it is at the root of all our institutions?

Who will give it back its potency?—They who will know how to resign themselves to being *but a voice!*

PERMIT me to bring home to you, by means of a very modest example, what man may gain in force by being but a voice. Look at that clock. When the hour has come, it marks it.

Whether it be the hour of birth or of death, the hour of joy or of sorrow, the hour of longed-for meetings, or of heart-breaking farewells the clock strikes that hour. It is only a mechanism, but it is scrupulously exact, it measures that time which descends to us drop by drop from the bosom of eternity, and when the hammer falls on the brazen bell, the entire universe confirms what it announces. The suns and the worlds mark this very moment, in the immortal light, the same point of time that is indicated below on earth, some starless night, by the humblest village clock. — We must imitate the clock. In full consciousness, through absolute submission, man should make himself the humble instrument of truth, and go through supreme servitude to supreme power. When he does not do this, he is only an imperfect timepiece. But when, bound by his word, chained to the truth that he serves, he has become its slave, and when, without hate, without preference, without human fear, without other desire than that of being faithful, he proclaims what is just, true, right, good, the rocks are less firm on their base than this man : *for he is a voice !*

A VOICE is, if you like, a slight thing. Stilled as soon as it awakened, it is heard only by a few and for a little while. It is said that singers are greatly to be pitied, since posterity cannot hear them. Nothing of them remains. And yet how many marvellous forces underlie this apparent fragility! The thunder has its roar, the breeze has its tenderness, but their power is transitory; they are sounds and not voices. A voice is a living sound, it is the vibrant echo of a soul. It is doubtless that most fragile thing, a *breath*, but joined to that which is most durable, *spirit*. And it is for this reason that, if the instant when it is born sees it die, centuries of centuries cannot destroy its effect. The truth which is in it confers immortality upon it, and when this voice escapes from a human breast, he who speaks, sings or weeps, feels indeed that eternity has concluded an alliance with him. Feeling his fragile testimony confirmed by all that endures and cannot die, he says with Christ: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away!"

THE holy labours entrusted to the voice can never be counted. Because of the very fact that it lives and that it contains a soul, it is the great awakener, the incomparable evoker. When, obscure still, and unknown a thought distracts us and slumbers at the bottom of our being, a voice is all that is needed to make it emerge into the light. With maternal tenderness, the voice borrows all the energies of incubation, to infuse with warmth, to fortify, the nascent germs of spiritual life. In it lives and breaks forth what, in the evolving soul, tends feebly and furtively towards the flowering. In short, the voice, speech, the tongue, condenses in a single focus, incalculable quantities of rays.

Only think of the efforts that human thought must have made, to reach that clearness that enables it to become speech. Every word that you utter without giving it a thought, is a monument towards which centuries and multitudes of minds have wrought. A world is contained in it. Poor words! one man decks himself out in them, another wraps himself up in them, but how few know of the warmth of life and love that has put them into the world that they may be forever the wit-

nesses of the past for posterity! No matter, for when they have been made sufficiently to resound like an intricate cymbal, there comes an hour when they revive under the breath of a true and living being, and they depart to spread life. Then they fulfil their role as educators. To educate is to explain a being to itself. And this is the benign service that the voice performs. It tells us what we think better than we can ourselves. It unbinds the chains of the captive soul and permits it to take its flight. Happy the child, happy the young man who meets with a voice to decipher him to himself! This is what Christ did in those blessed hours when he reunited the children of his people, as a bird reunites its brood under its wings!

WHAT the voice does in detail, it continues to accomplish on the larger scale. At certain moments societies seem a prey to a sort of chaos. A number of contrary forces clash and perturb them, as they perturb and rend individual souls. Men seek, feeling their way, a road that seems to elude them. A crowd of spirits, by the very fact of their contem-

poraneity, feel themselves distracted and agitated all in the same way. Confusedly and provoked by the same sufferings they elaborate the same ideal and formulate the same desires. But they all wander along twilight paths on the side of the night where the light seems to be breaking through, without, however, being able to pierce the darkness. These are the preliminary agonies of the great historical epochs. Then let a being more powerful, more vital, an elect soul that has passed through this phase and conquered these shadows, become incarnate in a voice! That is enough. The personal word which expresses the soul of that epoch and responds to its needs, is found. It sounds through the world like a new *fiat lux!* Everywhere, in those who listen to it and feel secret affinities with it in themselves, it constitutes a magnificent revelation of light and life. All these hearts vibrate in unison with one; and, gathering up all these scattered notes into a single harmony, he who expresses the sentiments of all, renders an account of the wonderful power of which he is the instrument. No, it is no longer a man that speaks: what sounds upon his lips, is the whole soul of a people, is a whole epoch, is a new world.

A VOICE is also that inimitable sigh, that pure sob which tells of grief because it issues from a suffering heart. It is pity and compassion, it is the angel of God arriving among us on the caressing breath, a messenger of mercy, and pouring into the tortured depths of our poor heart its healing dew. It is Jesus saying to Mary, and, in her, to all those whom grief afflicts: "Why weepest thou?" It is David singing: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" It is Isaiah crying: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem!"

A VOICE is, on the solitary path where our will strays, the faithful shepherd calling his sheep; it is every sign, even though it be made by the hand of a child, which in the days of forgetfulness and unrestraint, suddenly wakes us and warns us that our feet skirt the abysses.

THEN, after the work of education, of creation, of pity, comes the work of severity, of punishment, of destruction. The voice has been compared to a sword. Like it, it flames and punishes. A voice is Nathan rising up

before the criminal king and calling down upon his head the avenging lightning of this word: "Thou art the man!" The sword attacks, destroys, but it defends also, and this is its fairest work. Never is the voice more touching than when it is lifted in favour of the weak, and, when, suddenly, in the midst of the iniquities of brute force that it denounces, marks with its stigma, it causes justice to shine forth and the truth to be felt, in the holy soul-traversing thrill, that God himself is there and that his hour has come!

A VOICE has its echo. When this echo is sympathetic, it is endowed with the sweetest recompense and obliterates the memory of many sorrows. But this echo is often hostile. It arises from wrath and is increased by hatred. Then it is resistance, riot, that rumbles. It is the passions and the scourged vices that twist and bellow like deer under the lash of the trainer. How many times, oh faithful voices, souls of peace and truth, has the spirit that animates you driven you to these fearful encounters! You who have heard in the silence of your hearts the holy verities and who know their worth, you are obliged to go

bearing them in the face of menace, of mockery, of trembling rage where they seem to us like Daniel in the lion's den. A terrible ordeal, but one before which the testifying voices have never recoiled. Luther, who knew the emotions of the great battles of the spirit where one man is alone in the face of a thousand, where under the growing clamours and the cries of death . . . a voice struggles like a torch in a tempest, has given to the servants of truth a counsel that is the alpha and omega of their austere mission. When they have said all, done all, essayed all, put all their being and all their love into the proclamation of what they have to announce, then, he says, "let them be ready to be hooted at and spat upon!" And not only should they be ready but they should accept this lot with happiness. Christ says to them: "Happy are they that are outraged and persecuted for the sake of justice!"

ALAS, the rudest proof for him who speaks the truth is not to arouse indignation. That, at least, is a result, and however sad it may be, it bears witness to him who has spoken. Certain protests, despite their fury, are a sort of in-

voluntary homage. The supreme trial for a voice is indifference. When John called himself a voice in the wilderness, he alluded to that external solitude where his voice was raised. But this solitude, on certain days was full of life and the Gospel cites for our benefit certain facts which prove that the words with which it resounded were not lost in the empty spaces. They moved and struck home from the humblest regions of society to the exalted spheres, to the royal throne itself. John garnered love and hate, blessing and curse, the desirable fruits of all energetic action. Since that time and before, more than one voice has been able, applying them to itself, to give to those prophetic words "voices in the wilderness" another very melancholy significance. The supreme image of despair is a voice that is lost in the silence, as is lost in the bosom of dead solitudes, the call that never hears, for succour that will never come.

AFTER having spoken of the different voices, of their power, of their effects, let us bestow a compassionate remembrance upon the lost voices, or those who were or who are still, in the most lamentable sense of that word,

voices in the wilderness. — To be a man, a soul, to have felt the lighting of a holy flame within one's self; to love truth and justice; to feel the pain of contact with a life ruled over by falsehood and violence; at the heart of this poignant contrast between a divine ideal and a heart-rending reality, to receive from his conscience, from God himself, the command to speak; to put his life into this work, to renounce everything to be only a voice . . . and after all this to see himself forsaken, neglected, despised! To wear one's self out slowly in a strife obscure and without issue; to perish without having aroused either sympathy or opposition, to disappear into oblivion before disappearing in the tomb . . . ah! all the furies, all the bloody reprisals, the dungeons, the gibbets, the massacres, all the martyrdoms by which human wickedness strove to stifle the voice of the just, are less horrible than this extermination by apathy.

AND yet, not to press things to this cruel extremity, but remembering the parable of the sower, where so many seeds are lost for the few that take root and flourish, ought we not be willing to be, in the greatest number of

cases, voices in the wilderness, only too happy if our thankless labours are recompensed elsewhere by an encouraging echo? Have we not here, on the contrary, the image of human life? We are always aspiring towards an ideal more elevated than that which we realize. We are always precursors, and it becomes us to accept humbly what that destiny holds both of pain and of beauty.

Besides, do we know whether voices that seem to be lost, are so in reality? Are the stones that are hidden in the foundations of a beautiful edifice, and thanks to which the whole fabric is supported, lost because no one sees them? In the same way it must be that many voices are forgotten apparently, until such time as, added together and finding in each other mutual support, they end by emerging into the full light of day.

To wait and to work; to do his duty, and leave the rest to God; to journey through life, gathering truth into his heart, and then into the family, the church, the city; to be its faithful voice; this is the best use a man can make of his mortal days. And should it be your lot to be voices in the wilderness; among your children deaf to your cries; among your compatriots insensible to your warnings, con-

sole yourselves. Greater than you have suffered the same fate. Unite yourself in spirit to their company and be happy to suffer with them. At least as you come to understand more and more from day to day that truth cannot perish, and that it is potent even on feeble lips; you will establish in your hearts faith in the world that endures, and you will be less astonished and less disconcerted when you see the face of this world pass away. You will live by the sacred fire cherished in your souls. Let your furrow close your hope will not perish! Like Moses on Nebo, you will enter into the silence, having filled your dying eyes with the spectacle of the promised land!

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**NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO
MASTERS**

READING 3

And the devil taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them : for that is delivered unto me ; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Luke : iv, 5-8.

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. Hebrews : xii, 12.

Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries ? either a vine, figs ? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. James : iii, 12.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Revelation : iii, 15, 16.

And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. II Timothy : ii, 19.

NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS

No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Matthew : vi, 24.

THERE are certain sympathetic subjects, subjects that one loves to hear developed: the grace and goodness of God, the soul's peace, the eternal consolations, all the tender and luminous side of the Gospel. And there are also subjects that are antipathetic, with regard to which one would gladly say to the preacher: we prefer to hear you speak on this subject some other day. The one that I have chosen belongs to this latter category. But it is not uncommon that the things that we like least do us the most good. May it please God to move our hearts by these austere and unequivocal words, to grant us strength where we are weak

and to discourage us from living in a state of contradictions and compromises.

NO man can serve two masters. It is impossible to find a clearer saying. The statement is categorical. If it embarrassed us less, we should find nothing to say against it. But as the thought takes on a personal application and presses us close, we seek to find the image in fault.

“NO man can serve two masters.” — And why not? It is all in knowing how. Is it not enough to have sufficient spiritual resources, and a suppleness in harmony with the exigencies of the situation? The comparison may be true for people of narrow limitations, without horizon, for those who essay to cover their lack of ability by the old proverb: “It is impossible to be both at the oven and at the mill at the same time.” We admit that it is difficult to serve two masters; but it is not impossible. It is difficult also to do two things at once, and there are those that go about repeating that it is possible to do well only one piece of work at a time. But everybody knows that certain great minds have accomplished that of

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which little minds are incapable. Cæsar dictated several letters at once on several subjects, and his vast thought thus gave occupation to several secretaries and prepared work for a multitude of correspondents, generals, politicians, friends or enemies. We have seen in our own day, even, workers endowed with prodigious force and penetration, assuming the whole weight of government and condensing in a single activity the functions of several ministers. All this is true; but we shall call attention to the fact that in the cases cited, it is a question rather of the quantity of the efforts accomplished than of the end itself of these efforts. To assume a double or triple portion of labour depends only upon our strength; but to propose for one's self a double or triple end, is beyond the capacity of any strength. Let us suppose that the paucity of statesmen in our time should inspire two rival countries with the idea of entrusting their affairs to the same diplomatic agent. However consummate a diplomat he might be, he would not be able to cope with such a problem. Every one feels that it is insoluble. It would be as easy for one captain to command at the same time two hostile armies without treason to either of them.

IT is in this sense that Christ has said: "No man can serve two masters." In the great struggle between good and evil, which fills the world and the lives of men, it is not possible to be at once for the good and for the evil, for God and against God. Does it not seem that in saying this, Christ affirmed the most commonplace of truths?

What reason could he then have had for enunciating axioms of such infantile simplicity, supported by evidence so obvious?

The reason is this: For the immense majority of men, life consists in playing the subtle diplomat who holds in his hands the threads of the policies of two hostile states and who essays to serve both. And like those who seek to square the circle or to solve the problem of perpetual motion, they waste their lives in this game. My first concern will be to show its vanity. I admit, moreover, that many of those who play at it have never perceived this vanity, and that the saying of Jesus is addressed rather to those hearts undecided although sincere, than to villains grown old in duplicity.

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A FEW very ordinary examples, taken at random from human life, will enable us to place our finger upon the contradiction of our acts, and the incompatibility of the enterprises that we undertake to carry on simultaneously. — Let us first speak of God and Mammon, since, also, our text invites us to speak of them.

“Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” Elsewhere it said: “Keep ye from avarice.” Although the conflict between the service of the good and just God and material interests breaks out apropos of a thousand questions, big and little, it manifests itself, however, in all its acuteness in avarice.

Avarice is the love of money or of property, transformed into a religion. The miser has ceased to possess with that liberty and that independence which a man ought always to keep with respect to what serves him as an instrument: he is possessed. His wealth is no longer his tool, but his master and his God. There is no stranger spectacle than a miser who is at the same time devout, and who essays to carry on simultaneously the worship of money and the service of God. It is God's will that we love our brothers, and that we prove this love by the means that are in our power. To love God

and to give one's self, or to give willingly of our wealth, is all one. But the god of the miser does not so understand it. It is the will of this god that money be hoarded. Whoever approaches us to persuade us to sacrifice the least part of it is a tempter. Poverty, misery, public interest, everything that makes a man decide to give, are so many impostures.

There then are two masters that cannot be served together. The miser gets out of the situation by offering to the living God Platonic demonstrations, and to the other a real and fruitful service. But in the end he blends the two, and after having created a religion of avarice, with an avaricious god and a worship worthy of him, he deduces from it a miser's code of morals. For him, the holy of holies, the repository of the ten commandments, is the strong-box. All that contributes to fill it is good, all that tends to empty it is bad. It is for this reason that the miser reaches the point, imagining always that he is serving God, of performing with a pious scrupulousness and with entire devotion, the most hideous acts. He does his duty by keeping his heart insensible; he serves God and leads others to his service by extorting with a

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pitiless hand, and then closing this hand on his prey as the tomb closes upon the corpse. The crowning-point of this heresy is reached when the miser is the custodian of a church's wealth, and he performs all these horrors to keep and increase the money of the good God.

Seen thus the conflict is flagrant and the contrast is violent. Such a life fills us with indignation. You will then charge me with exaggeration if I say that this miser is the model of all of us. But we content ourselves with copying it in part. We have some acts of generosity to our credit, no doubt. We are neither in deed nor in intention servants of Mammon, like that miser whom we reprove in all good faith. Are there not, however, other acts in our life? You who to-day open your hand to give, have you not on certain occasions, asserted, to the point of harshness, your right to possess, silenced your heart and abjured duty to safeguard interest? You are good and ready to relieve within such limits as your egoism allows and that do not encroach upon it. In truth your goodness is only a poor little bird with clipped wings and imprisoned in an iron cage. When you examine your life close to, you have silenced the voice of tenderness, the

voice of love, the voice even of blood before the exigencies of interest. To keep and to increase your wealth, you have frequented evil society, closed your eyes upon equivocal proceedings. At decisive moments you have always capitulated. It is possible then that you serve but one master, in fact, it is certain; but that master is not the one you suppose, that your prayers imply, to whom your outward shows are addressed, in whose church you exercise certain functions perhaps, and even strict control over the beliefs of others: Your real God is Mammon; quotations are your law, stocks are your prophets!

Some one says to me: I am poor, and thinks he has justified himself. — Take care, my brother, one may serve Mammon, and betray goodness and pity for a few bits of money and a few morsels of bread, as well as for titles.

I DO you the honour to think that you love justice and that you love it for its own sake, and not for the rights that it confers upon you and the support that it gives you. You wish then to serve it, and to serve justice is one of the ways of serving God. Although God is

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spirit, all ways of serving him resolve themselves into practical determinations; there is no Platonic fashion of serving God, no way which does not leave some trace upon life. And, indeed, I perceive in your life intentions, determinations and even sacrifices for justice. You wish the person of the weak to be sacred, his cause to be defended, the power that the strong of the earth arrogate to themselves, limited and tempered by an equitable law. You have even been seen to expose yourself to attacks or to hatred in order to prevent an injustice or to repair a wrong. In this your conscience undoubtedly gives you its approval and we are in accord with it.

Permit me, however, to say to you that this useful labour and these right intentions are counter-balanced by actions that are of a nature clearly contrary and to which you have not perhaps given sufficient attention.

You returned the other day from a meeting where you had heard a discussion of the miseries of the common people and of certain proceedings, affecting those in humble life, that had outraged your feelings. On entering your house, you found your servant slow to wait upon you; your postman

had committed a serious error in your correspondence; a person to whom you had done a favour had passed you in the street without recognition, and you received a little later the news that part of your fortune had been seriously endangered in an industrial enterprise in which you had invested it.

You roundly abused your servant, addressed a complaint to the postal authorities; thought to yourself that the man who had cut you was an ingrate, and composed forthwith a letter of recrimination and of vehement reproaches addressed to those friends to whom you had entrusted your money, and all this with the feeling that you were availing yourself of your right.

But, this is what you did not know: that very same day your servant had been deeply distressed by bad news from her father's house; your letter-carrier's son had just returned from the colonies, and feelings quite easy to understand completely dominated him; the man who had not bowed to you in the street was affected with near-sightedness, and the industrial affair that filled you with so many evil thoughts, had felt the effect of certain far-off events that were beyond human foresight and responsibility. You have then in the highest degree

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been unjust and made those whom you might have done some good, suffer. But ignorance, perhaps, excused you. Very well . . . ; and yet there are forms of ignorance for which there is no excuse. Why are you ignorant, for example, that the handsome income that you derive from a certain investment, is the result of a kind of traffic that debases and demoralizes the masses? Why are you ignorant of the moral and material sufferings of the beings who procure your bread for you? Men have no right to be ignorant of certain things. Culpable ignorance causes us to fall daily into the gravest acts of injustice.

It also involves us in insurrection against truth which is the sister of justice. We all love the truth, my brothers; that is taken for granted. By our speech, by our pens, by every means, we wish to serve it. But there are in the world a great many folk who believe themselves sincerely attached to truth, and who yet daily cause it to sustain the severest blows.

You, who are a journalist, you, who are a churchman, both loyally attached to your convictions and in no wise animated by the spirit of calumny which infects the body politic and the sacris-

ties, you commit, every day, sins against truth. Why? Because you are in utter ignorance of the state of mind, the intentions, the true purposes of your adversaries. You seek the welfare of the country or of the church through the extirpation of certain tendencies that you qualify as errors, as impostures. You charge your adversaries with want of patriotism, or you accuse them of unbelief. But, they are as necessary to the country as you are, as indispensable as you to religion. You disturb their peace, you wound their conscience, you reject them in the name of truth. You regard yourself as a defender of sound doctrines, when in fact you have merely set on foot the least intelligent and most sterile of strifes, that of the right hand against the left. Soldier of the truth, you are firing upon your own allies, and you know it not. The prayer that the persecuted and crucified Christ made on behalf of his blind adversaries, might well be applied to you: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do! It remains none the less sad to serve falsehood while you believe that you have consecrated yourself to truth; injustice, fancying yourself to be fighting for justice, and, I repeat, it remains not the less odious to continue to

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do evil under the sway of an ignorance in which there is no fatality, but which, on the contrary, in the greatest number of instances is intentional, premeditated, carefully maintained.

You cannot serve two masters! One of the classes of men who are most in need of being reached by this saying, are those uncompromising champions of political and religious parties, precisely because they are wrongly persuaded that they serve only one master, that they serve him decisively, without compromise and without regard for anybody.

To all appearance, these religious or political swashbucklers are men of one word of command, of a single direction, firm and frank, upright, incorruptible, and they willingly accuse peaceful and moderate men of carrying water upon both shoulders, of serving God and Mammon. They possess themselves of the dilemma of Jesus: Either good or evil; either for or against; either yes or no. You shall be for free trade or protection, for the old régime or for revolution, for free thought or for blind faith, for a fixed dogma in a confession of faith, or for spiritual anarchy. You shall believe in the God-Christ and all the miracles,

or you shall be only an unbeliever and a pagan. Either you shall believe and cease to reason, or you shall reason and cease to believe. Very well, but let me tell you that this is deceiving yourself with words, — self-delusion, — and subjects the cause you wish to serve to the most lamentable hazards. No, it is not enough to have only one idea in order to serve only one master, to bend exclusively to one side in order not to lose your equilibrium. Nothing is less certain, less conformable to the principle of fidelity, to respect for men and the obedience due to God, than the application, in all cases and in all situations, of a single word of command, of a single formula. Reasoning by dilemma, politics based upon dilemmas, religious tendencies that proceed by dilemmas, are full of reefs, of dangers and of illusions.

They enable us to dispense with examining each case by itself, and resolve all questions for us in advance. Under no consideration should a conscience consent to bind itself thus to what is but a necessary preliminary; the result is too terrible, and the facts prove it. Every day men of feeling, of good faith, and of good will are led to do violence to their most human and enlightened in-

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instincts, for the purpose of performing some imagined duty of fidelity to an ideal. They console themselves with the old adage: *dura lex, sed lex*. And should the condemnations, the excommunications to which they are thus led nearer and nearer, even while regretting and deploring them, be the testimonials given to country, to God, to the public good, to charity? What an error! Under no pretext can iniquity become law. In no case can a man be led by his conscience to perform acts which, at bottom, wound him and bruise him in the best part of his nature. His very sorrow ought to cry out to him: Take care, here is the enemy! But if the easy procedure of dilemmas, of settled tendencies, of *a priori* judgments, causes individuals to commit veritable iniquities, to what does it not lead collections of individuals, political and religious parties, as a whole? Here are institutions, mediums that proclaim themselves the guardians and ramparts of truth. . . . Formulate an objection, hazard a criticism in the name, even, of this truth. . . . You will see how they receive you. Incapable of accepting instruction or warning, consequently of facing the truth, these same mediums become incapable of discerning evil, of

judging a fault. When one is committed, their first question is this: Who did it? — If it is a friend, they say: Quick, cover it up! Screen it! Silence and discretion! If it is an adversary, they cry: trumpets and fanfares! let the whole world ring with it! . . . Two weights, two measures — this is the inevitable abyss towards which these individuals and bodies pledged to non-compromise under pretext of decision are running: "For the tree is known by its fruit!" This is the occasion to recall it. The political and religious passions must have been unhealthy indeed for Christ to have launched against them a sentence of such shocking severity: The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you!

No man can serve two masters. Let us pass on to other instances:

Do you love your children? Unless you are dealing with perverted natures, you are always sure to receive an affirmative answer to this question. To love one's children is another form of the service of God, for each of our children is one of his hopes. To prove to our children that we love them, we seek to spare them pain, to remove obstacles from their path, in order that some day they may be

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happier than we. We also deal gently with their wishes and their whims. To increase their welfare we are ever on the breach, stubborn in the strife, marching without hesitation on the ranks of the assailants. When it is a question of our children, every means of acquiring wealth seems sanctified to us. Is it not for our dear little ones? Through such practices are produced natures weakened, egotistical, incapable of effort and of sacrifice, natures disarmed before the harsh realities of life, that the first winds of adversity will bruise and beat down. But cowards and weaklings in what concerns their own persons and their comfort, these same natures will be inflexible and insensible with respect to their neighbour, as hardened to pity as accessible to suffering. There then are children that are reared for their own unhappiness and for that of others: I ask myself how God will be the gainer by it? Evidently, thinking to serve our children, we sometimes become their worst enemies.

Here is the moment to say, that not only should we not countenance the commission of an injustice for the sake of those whom we love, but that all we do that is wrong, we do against those that we love.

You are a good father, a respectful child, a devoted citizen, a pious believer. Then say to yourself that you must hate evil, falsehood, fanaticism, avarice, impurity and robbery, and that there is not one single slip from good conduct that does not fall on those that you love best. Whoever gives way to his lower inclinations, whoever, though ordinarily just, good, upright, pure, temperate, constitutes in his life a habit of exceptions, of extras, accords a place, a gratification to carnal desires, to the pleasure of speaking ill of others, to sectarian passions, to ill-gotten gain, to all that is not right, even though he should carefully conceal it from himself — whoever does these things, attacks the shelter that defends us, shakes the columns of the edifice!

Do you wish the fragile heads of your children to sleep in peace on their pillows, the white head of your father to repose in peace in the tomb; do you wish your sons to be valiant, your daughters to be full of grace, the tears of the unhappy to be dried, the chains of prisoners to fall; innocence to shine in all eyes, imposture to be confounded, the mild kingdom of the Father to come? Then, whatever be the place, the hour when the tempter ap-

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proaches you, seductive, engaging, or menacing and to be feared: call to mind all that you love! Let this memory guard you, arouse you for the combat, give you a vigilant eye, render your arm invincible! If you surrender, think of all that you betray! This is what nearly all of us do not sufficiently feel. The deep-seated solidarity of our acts is not sufficiently present to our memory. We think that we can reserve a place for our failings, for those sins that are too dear to be relinquished.

DUPLICITY, rending apart, partition of the will and of the heart, lamentable division, that is our life! It is not a continuous chain, it is only links broken and dispersed. We are peace-loving, just, truthful, sober, chaste, disinterested; but we are also malicious, unjust, cunning, intemperate, impure. We are like those ships that carry to the colonies, along with the Bibles and religious tracts, cannon, alcohol, and opium; or those poets full of contrary talents, who play turn by turn on the sacred lyre and on the strident conch-shell. Perhaps, also, we think to counterbalance our grave errors by exceptional

virtues. In short we seek middle-ways, combinations, so as not to give ourselves unreservedly to God. After having practised this life for long years, we balance our account and are astonished at the slightness of the results. We have worked a great deal, walked a great deal, and yet we are no farther along for all that. Discontent or discouragement gains upon us. The evening of life darkens about us, the word, "vanity of vanities," rises to our lips!

We do wrong to complain, for the results obtained are on a level with the means employed. When one proceeds after the fashion of certain processions, that take one step back every time they take two forward, what is there astonishing if he does not cover any appreciable distance? But man has the silly childishness to believe that what he does at certain hours and without the pale of that part of his life which is known, does not count. He flatters himself that the assets alone will figure in the final reckoning; that what he puts openly in the balance will be weighed, but that what he secretly withdraws will not be deducted. Like that merchant, at once pious and crafty who, on Sunday closed his shop, but received his patrons

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through a side door, he honours God publicly, and, in secret, betrays him. Oh, the ruses useless to deceive God, to still the conscience, to escape the effect when the cause has been sown! And, above all, the sad enterprise, the miserable existence, the shameful, the intolerable servitude!

THAT man who gives good precepts and even good examples to his children, it is you, and that man who, through culpable weakness, commits acts of profanation in the domestic sanctuary, it is you.

The Christian who adores the God of good, who knows the sole greatness and the sole positive value, the treasure of the spirit, it is you; and that man who runs after money, distinctions, it is you.

That servitor zealous of all that is good, it is you; that jealous victim of envy, it is you.

You know it, you feel it; the burden of this memory and of these comparisons, haunts you and pursues you . . . and yet you can live thus? But it is not life, it is worse than death, it is the lot of those who have been buried alive.

LET yourself be brought back to life! let yourself be grasped by that severe yet merciful hand which wrests us away from the contradictions of conduct, from the tortures of divided hearts. Let these words awaken you, arrest you, strike you, and heal you: No man can serve two masters!

Give your hand to God and let him take your entire will. Do not complain of your weakness, of the hard road, of the obstacles, the probable falls . . . provided that your heart be not divided! If you chance to depart from the straight line, return to it; if you fall, pick yourself up! If you cannot take two steps, take one, and if you cannot walk, crawl along on your knees!

WHEN the Jews, exiled from the Holy Land, died afar off among the pagans and the persecutors, they had themselves laid in their tombs, with their faces turned towards Jerusalem! If your strength betrays you, if it is not for you, during life, to enter into perfect peace, to be delivered from certain enemies of the soul, from certain humiliating miseries that set your best will at defiance, if you must fall in the

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mêlée, fall at least, with your face turned towards Jerusalem.

THIS is the true, the only life: to serve one master; to have but one love, one goal, to return to it always. To serve until your hair has grown white in the service! Since man must ever serve, and since, in spite of himself, he marches under a banner and fights for a cause, let us serve Him who guides the stars, who causes the flower to smile, in whom the poor hope, in whom the dying fall asleep; let us serve Him who counts the tears of the afflicted, listens to the prayer of the lowly, pardons the sins of those that truly repent, and rejects no one, but seeks to save him who is lost.

To be His whether the day is breaking or at its decline, whether man flatters or menaces, whether reason sees clearly or hesitates; to be His through all things,— that is the fruitful and unregretful life.

TRUTH, my friends, is man's friend; it is perhaps never more salutary than when it shows a very serious face. Under that severe brow lives a thought of love. *No man can serve two masters!* Words of negation, words of

prohibition, do you think ? It is only in appearance. At bottom there is only sweetness in this severity, only promises in these interdictions. Stated positively, it reads thus :

You who err, you who waver, you who bear up and down the world the burden of an unsteadfast heart, and the grievous problem of impossible accords, come ! Come ! I know eternal heights, stars whose peaceful ray shines over all the mutations of these terrestrial atmospheres. Come, I will lead you to the city high and sure, to the great chief of holy combats, to Him whose service procures not the pleasure of an hour, or the peace of a day, but a joy eternal, a strength that is never destroyed !

**CONCERNING THE NEED OF
CONFESSION**

READINGS

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper : but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Proverbs : xxviii, 13.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me. . . .

I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Psalms : xxxii, 1-5.

CONCERNING THE NEED OF CONFESSION

Confess your faults one to another. James : v, 16.

TO market old remedies that have gone out of fashion, or fallen into discredit, clever manufacturers give them another name and a new wrapper. Purchasers who go by the label, and they are in the majority, think that they have found a godsend, and take up the concoction eagerly.

One is occasionally tempted to have recourse to such a trick, in the interest of certain old practices, excellent in themselves, but disqualified by abuse. Who for example, could recommend fasting, giving it its right name? To recommend it, not in the name of hygiene, but in a moral, religious, social interest, without covering himself with ridicule or laying himself open to suspicion of imposture?

And yet, how many good reasons would he not have for running all these risks at once, seeking to render tribute to truth and service to mankind? The reasons strike the minds of clear-seeing people, but the risk stands them off. They keep still or else they imitate the above-mentioned manufacturers: they remove the mark from the suspected article, and try to launch it under another label. This, in my opinion, is to yield to a temptation of the lower order. When a man recognizes a duty he ought to have the courage for its accomplishment, or not to meddle with it at all. Great causes do not love shame-faced defenders.

It is from this principle that I am going to draw inspiration to speak of confession. I designate it, I name it, and if I thought that it was necessary to raise my voice, I should willingly cry its name aloud instead of contenting myself with pronouncing it.

CONFESSION has a history. I shall not recount it; it would be useless trouble. Confession has been judged, condemned, rejected by the Protestant Church. Several attempts at official restoration have given ground

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only to unhealthy practices soon confounded with the old mechanical system of confession, in the justest of reprobations. All this is true; but what is truer still, is man's need for self-revelation. What we commonly call confession, applies on the whole, only to those parasitical growths that are developed in response to this need. Are we not in the same situation with respect to all the fundamental tendencies of our nature? Are they not all debased, disfigured, exploited? The crime, forever inextinguishable, which is the root of all abuse, is its tendency to discredit, and often to destroy, legitimate usage. Abuse is the great enemy of life and of God. It is the thief and the usurper, it is the seller installed in the temple, it is the whole profane hoard, soiling what is holy, and transforming into an infamous den the asylum of prayer. But we should never capitulate before abuse, or grow weary of rediscovering the lineaments of humanity beneath all grimaces and caricatures. Let us remove the impurities, efface the trace of outrages, seek out what is essential: but, at the bottom of the human heart, there is the need of self-revelation.

THE soul is a world full of depths and of invisible riches, which tend ceaselessly to take form and to emerge. For the accomplishment of this task, we possess, in the whole of the forms of our material life, a prodigious machinery. Just as creation is the revelation of God, — His avowal, as a poet has said, — so in the same way the external life of man, when it follows its normal development, is the translation, in signs and symbols, of what he bears at the bottom of his being. It would be easier to keep the sap from mounting, the flowers from opening, the leaves from tearing apart their coverings, than human nature from manifesting itself. It is this need that gives man his distinction as a social and communicative being.

The highest happiness consists in the manifestation and exchange of impressions, of sentiments, of discovered truths, and in their vigorous assertion in action. As soon as the need of self-revelation is thwarted under one of its essential aspects, a sickly state ensues. There are created in the inner life morbid centres, sore spots. However little the ill is augmented, we suffer and we vegetate. This is the unhappy thing about all confiscations of liberty. Corporeal chains, and spiritual servitudes, all

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the proceedings that violate nature and pervert its ways, have as their inevitable result, the destruction of healthy life and the replacing of it by monstrosities. And too, with what energy, with what invincible obstinacy, does not nature return to the charge to assert its rights? Cut a man off from the world, condemn him to solitude: he will make desperate efforts to atone for the absence of beings like himself, he will reveal his heart to the stars, to the waves; he will breathe, as Schiller says, a soul into the rocks. Close even this outlet for him. When you have separated him from men, separate him from nature, and place him in a cell: he will speak to his prison walls, to the fly, to the spider that weaves its web, to the sickly blade of grass that makes shift to shelter, between two stones, an existence like his own, and there will grow up between him and these obscure beings, a bond of sympathy, as it were.

IT is not possible that a human tendency so strongly marked should not flow back into every domain of life. Applied to our moral being, this need of self-revelation is the need of confession properly speaking. Do not tell me that the

fundamental tendency is to conceal the evil that we have done. If you did, I should refer you to documents which, in this case, are called *little children*. With them the outside is the faithful translation of what is within. They tell everything. Punishments, the bursts of stupid laughter of their elders, crowd them back little by little into themselves, and oblige them to dissemble. But this dissimulation is an artificial production. It is like the dikes designed to confine the flood. That has its law which is to flow, and often it breaks its dikes. The child is so unhappy at certain moments, so tormented by its secret, that the soul breaks through to light in a torrent of tears. We look on at these explosions of grief as at irresistible manifestations of natural forces, and he is blind indeed who does not interpret so clear a lesson. No matter how far we advance in life, we cannot destroy the child in us. It is through him, in fact, that we are brought back into touch with the great current of human life. The child within us can slumber, without doubt, but it cannot die, and the hours come, when, under whitened locks, we are caught weeping like a child. Despite all ulterior dissimulations, there survives the need of saying everything, as

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when we were little, and of being understood as then. To confess yourself, to give yourself just as you are to some one who will know how to decipher you and explain you, at need, to yourself — a transcendent boon that you have experienced at the knees of your mother in the fair past that appears to memory like a corner of a lost paradise — the most taciturn has moments when he aspires to a taste of this happiness!

Criminals even, those hardened beings who, ordinarily, laugh at everything, and show but little trace of what we call conscience, rarely keep their secret. It seems to burn them. They chalk it on the walls, and they betray it in their dreams. Their security depends upon their silence, and this silence they cannot keep. At every moment their speech skirts the terrible mystery, and takes on a hollow sound which recalls that of steps upon tunnelled earth. One guesses a gulf even when he does not see it. Revelation is more than a need, it is a necessity. It takes place sometimes in spite of ourselves and against our will.

Alas! it is not thirst that we want, but rather the spring where we may go and drink. Is not even the most sincere of us, he who knows neither hy-

pocrisy nor false modesty, constrained to shut himself up within himself? In whom can he confide? Is it not better to suffer all, to carry, if need be, his secret into the grave than to disclose it to an unworthy spectator? And who is there that is worthy to penetrate into that sanctuary of sorrow that we call a wounded heart?

MY mind can construct the traits of the ideal confessor. He has lived much and suffered much. The heights and depths, victory and defeat, smiles and tears, he has traversed them all. Nothing astonishes him, nothing leaves him indifferent, because nothing that is human is alien to him. He is very just and very severe; but he has, to touch the wounds of the heart, a hand that is almost maternal. He is not such and such a man who has his particular interests, his individual afterthoughts: no, he is no one and knows no one. He has abjured everything, even memory. He understands, but he does not retain. One may say to him: Listen, as if you were God; and be silent, as if you were the tomb!

To constitute this man, no title, no robe, no official position, no bond, even of blood, is enough.

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There must be that baptism of fire which confers grief, there must be that particular grace that renders the heart merciful and strong, without bitterness, without fear, and without complacency; there must be that something human and divine, both in one, that makes you a refuge and everything in you invite him who is unhappy to tell you his suffering, the sinner to confess to you his fault. Sweet and ideal form whose apparition haunts us in our troubled hours, do you exist on this earth? Or are you, like so many other fair creations of the heart, only a holy dream that reality belies?

WE touch here on a very serious point, so much the more serious, that the general tendency of the age is towards distrust rather than towards confidence, and for just cause! The character of the objections that can be presented to us is very serious. The heart-breaking facts, the criminal indiscretions, the abuses, are innumerable. We admit it. Let us even go a step farther than the objectors. Let us admit that the ideal confessor does not exist, has never existed. For indeed, even if there should be found at great intervals, a personality framed in conformity with

this ideal, it would not have superhuman faculties at its disposal, and could respond to the needs of only an infinitesimal minority of men. It would not be possible to base any general conclusion on the isolated fact of exceptional existences. But that proves nothing against the need of confession which is in us. It is this need that has given birth to all attempts, happy or unhappy, all institutions beneficent or ill-omened, destined to give it satisfaction. It will endure as long as human nature endures, surviving all disillusionments, immortal, like love always deceived, sullied, killed and yet ceaselessly born again from its ashes.

PERHAPS some one will say: That confidant of souls, that some one both good and strong, both severe and indulgent, whose aid we implore, exists, and exists for all, but he is not a man, he is *God*. I shall answer him very simply and in spite of all the contradictions that this answer is likely to arouse in minds formed to Protestant habits of thought, that this is not enough. Without doubt, to confess one's self to God, in all the extent and force of these terms, and with all the consequences that such an act carries with it,

is enough. And yet, is not one of these consequences to make us confess ourselves to a man, when it is a man whom we have deceived? Can a confession be worth anything when the fault continues? To be sincere with God, a hypocrite with men — is that possible? No, it is a snare and a delusion. — But confession to God alone is a delusion, above all when prayer is dead, and living faith decreases as is incontestably the case among a multitude of our contemporaries. The God to whom you make confession is not, in the greatest number of instances, the living God. He is a pale shadow, floating like an almost extinct memory in the little of religious sentiment that is left you. This shadow has eyes, but sees not, ears but hears not. You do not hesitate to commit your sins in His presence, when the presence of a man would restrain you. Your God is less than a man: it is not enough to make your confession to this God.

Before you can see again the living God, you must make your heart and your conscience pure, and walk in the paths of humility. You need crutches and you speak of spreading your wings like an eagle. To confess our faults to those like

ourselves is the best means of preparing ourselves truly to confess them to God himself.

LET us seek, therefore, means of practising what appears to us an unavoidable moral necessity. If we cannot attain to perfection, we shall do what we can. Let us draw inspiration from the story of the blind man and the paralytic. It is not in the Bible, but the idea is so diffused throughout the Gospel, that it may serve almost as well as a parable of Jesus. Let us render to one another, and in spite of our imperfections, that merciful office which consists in charging ourselves with the sins of others, with touching and binding up the wounds of their souls.

I am going to explain myself more at length with respect to the particular reasons that inspire me and that have become a kind of obsession of my mind. My inmost persuasion is, in fact, that mutual confession is a constant need, and never more than at this time, and this is why: *We are perishing of falsehood, of hypocrisy, of misunderstanding, of reservations, of sophistries of all sorts.* Duplicity is eating us away like a cancer. We could reply to Christ when he says: "You cannot serve two mas-

ters" — why not? since we serve three or four at the same time, without the least inconvenience. It is not the atheists, the impious, all the vulgar herd that the Pharisee enumerated in his self-satisfied prayer, that I have in mind when I say this, but almost the whole of our contemporaries, and, alas! also the immense majority of Christians. If the reader of these lines wishes to treat as a brother him who writes them, I shall confess that in addition I mean myself . . . him, perhaps. Let his conscience determine him on this last point.

MEN formerly made use of the terms Judaical or Jesuitical (according to the complexion of those who were speaking) to stigmatize the spirit of sophistry and of double meaning which permits the saying of everything without saying anything, the doing of everything without anything being done, and the delivering of one's self in the moral world, to the most eccentric *tours de force*. To-day it would be more unjust than ever to make this spirit the appanage of any particular race or society. Its lessons have been so well learned, its practices so ad-

mirably studied that it prevails to some extent everywhere. To meet men of two, three or four standards is a common thing. Those who have only one, as they have only one soul, one word, are anachronisms, and run the risk of being held in contempt. Morality is no more, the greater part of the time, than sheer casuistry. The principle of this casuistry is simple but admirable: "*When I, or any of mine, do these things, they are good ; when you, or any of yours, who are my adversaries, they are bad.*" Our age will be a gold mine for future moralists. It will be said of us: They were resourceful natures, full of contrasts and surprises; they held turn by turn, and even simultaneously, the most varied convictions and opinions; but they accomplished nothing, because their words and acts never failed mutually to destroy each other, and their life was naught but mirage and sterility. This spirit of falsehood and nullity extended into every domain of life. To appear, was their great aim. The phenomenal took the lead over the real.

But the basis of life and of society is *truth*. Truth is to the human world what fidelity to the eternal laws is to the starry world. Disturb these

laws, and there is no longer anything but collision, disorder, ruin.

This is what happens in human society, when we apply ourselves to deceiving each other. Imagine an industrial concern in which the partners lacked mutual sincerity, in which from the first purchase of the raw material, through the manufacture and the sale, every detail of operation was characterized by want of exactitude. How long will that last? The figures are wrong, what will the calculations be good for? Nothing any longer hangs together, nothing any longer responds to effort. Only an opportunity is needed for all these deceptions to break forth into the full light of day and for the common enterprise to crumble about the heads of these disunited associates. That is where we are to-day. Truth alone and entire integrity can save us.

Far from us is the puerile hope of seeing the great number quit the tortuous paths, in the next twenty-four hours, to return to the manly practices of sincerity. Far from us also is the pessimism which consists in despairing of our time. Our epoch, as a matter of fact, is no worse than any other. It only runs, under certain aspects, particu-

lar perils. It is these perils that it is necessary to recognize in order to try to avoid them.

EVERYTHING good has always sprung up in the hearts of a few, who, after they have recognized a truth, have constituted themselves its witnesses and its champions, and have assured its future at the cost of many sacrifices. It will not be otherwise with the cause with which we are engaged. Let there be constituted a body of the nobler spirits to restore to honour, in every domain of human life, this little word which seems nothing at all and which yet contains a world of meaning: yes is yes; no is no — an élite who, struck by the gulf of lies into which we are descending, has no longer, day or night, any other aim than the truth, in order to do it homage, without human fear, in all places, for and against all. It is a mission and an apostleship. The truth is so powerful that its defenders have need of no extraordinary qualities. To be faithful is their whole secret. A child with a secret is mightier than a man, even than many men, who know it not. But in the work of truth, one must commence with one's self. Down with hypocrisy and a dual life!

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THE first sacrifice to offer on the altar of truth is that personal sacrifice which consists in confessing your faults and showing yourself as you are. To whom shall we confess? To those whom we love. If there is one service of affection we can render, it is this. Why let hidden places which are the negation of esteem and affection, subsist between those who esteem and love each other? These secrets, veritable forbidden grounds, weigh like a curse on the unions we contract, and often it is the strongest, even, that are most disintegrated by them. There is only one durable pact, that which is cemented by truth. When we have communed together in the depths of absolute sincerity, our hearts have really met and are bound together for life and death.

Every one of us carries in his heart an intimate world of weaknesses and failings that he conceals with care. He scarcely acknowledges them to himself. From this obscure recess rise up, as from a polluted spring, powers of inertia, of discouragement, of doubt. Armed and valiant in appearance, we carry under that outside which the world sees, a wound that is sapping our strength. Unhappy that we are! We hold our peace, when we should cry

out: Help! Help! Why, after all, should we have friends if we cannot say to them: I am suffering, I am dying, stop and come to my aid?

But we are afraid of losing our friends if we show ourselves to them as we are. This fear is one of the punishments of our hypocrisy. To fear to lose an affection that is addressed not to us, but to some one whom we are impersonating, and in this fear to let the living heart die, in order to save the dead mask, — what more cruel suffering could be dreamt of? No, truth does not kill friendship; on the contrary, it makes it live. There exists a form of friendship, which is strong, durable, consoling, sweeter than all sentiments by whatever name we may call them, and which is the child of absolute intimacy, of that profound brotherhood which makes men share their secrets, as they break bread together. This friendship is little known and little practised. It flourishes on those heights of the life of the spirit to which faint and feeble souls never attain. But wherever it exists it becomes a hearth of benediction. It is like a centre of light and of warmth in the icy shades. I think of the unique bonds that bound Christ to his disciples, and that have everywhere bound men to their

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spiritual fathers, when this fraternity is inspired before all with a great pity for the poor sinner which is in each of us. The suffering creature revives under a look that searches him with sympathy, and replies: You sound my depths, you know me, and you love me: I give you my life, since you have saved it.

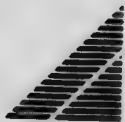
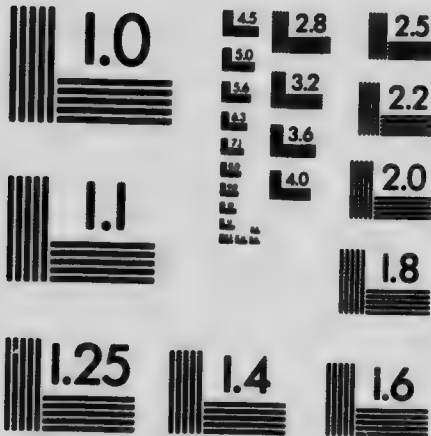
It is evident that Christ, coming among men, threw a light upon their own inner lives. Even while he was making them feel their misery more than they had ever felt it before, he gave them such an impression of life, of tenderness, of divine beauty, that all that they had known theretofore receded into the shade, and they had no longer perception for anything save what he had given them. He had descended so deep down into the depths of their being, that the world and men seemed strangers to them with their vain appearances, and that the only life henceforth was for them the life of the truth.

A GAIN I mention, to insist adequately upon the nature of the pact of sincerity of which I am speaking, the happy influence of youthful friendships, when they are based upon confidence and intimacy. Nothing like them is



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found afterwards in the later years of life, when the diplomatist has succeeded in replacing in us the young straightforward and loyal being who speaks as he thinks, and does not travel two roads; also, the strongest friendships, sources of energy and of infinite consolation, are those in which, in spite of the changes of life, there subsists between two men a confraternity of soul which takes its rise in youth.

And yet, I should regard as insufficient a confession that was reduced to our moral miseries alone. Man, unfortunately, does not seek only to conceal evil, he often conceals the good even more sedulously, and this is one of the great obstacles to the advancement of the reign of God. Each one of us has his particular mission. To each it is given to receive in his life an individual revelation. We need to confess, to tell to others the secret word that we decipher in our own conscience, and that human fear condemns to die with us, although, in truth, we have received life only to proclaim it. The world is harsh and pitiless to truth. Thus it often comes not to recognize it. *Vulgus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur!* This adage is the conclusion that thinkers derive from the obstacles that beset truth and from the

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ingratitude of which it is most often the victim. And it is thus that the night of error and falsehood goes on getting thicker.

It is indispensable to create shelters where truth can unfold in peace and speak to the ear before preaching from the house-tops. This need exists, doubtless, in every age, but it is more felt in tormented and critical times when intelligences and consciences are in travail. There is great danger, then, of having two thoughts: one within, the other for the public. This system, when it becomes general, leads straight to spiritual bankruptcy. I am afraid that it is only too much practised among ourselves. Let us be courageous enough to renounce it. We must see, understand, enter into communication — fraternize. In all domains of work and of human thought, it is to-day the capital need. More than anything else, what is now necessary for thinkers and men of action who are seeking to-morrow's roads, are good long talks under the mantel of the hearth, an absolutely sincere exchange of ideas. A fair recompense awaits those who arm themselves with courage to say what they think and what they feel. They discover friends and brothers, where they feared adversaries. When

truths are in the air and on men's lips there is needed only a generous heart to give itself to them: at once they come together from everywhere, they awaited only this voice to emerge into the light.

I THINK that these few reflections will find a few men to weigh them and comprehend them. There is a divine stranger that passes among all dwellings, knocking at the doors, always rejected, always coming back. When she knocks on your door, brother reader, open to her. She is to be feared only by those who ignore her and persecute her. For those who receive her, she is the messenger of God, the great liberator, her name is Truth.

CHRIST AT TABLE

READINGS

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him : and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh ? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily : and thy righteousness shall go before thee ; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer ; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity : And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul ; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day : And the Lord shall guide thee continually, satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones : and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places : thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations ; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. Isaiah : lviii, 7-13.

CHRIST AT TABLE

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy brethren, nor thy rich neighbours ; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind : And thou shalt be blessed ; for they cannot recompense thee : for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. Luke : xiv, 12, 13, 14.

ORDINARILY we picture Christ to ourselves on the cross, on the mount, where he proclaims the charter of the Kingdom of God, or in the circle of his disciples. More rarely, our imagination shows Him to us mingling in the petty events of daily life, taking His part in them, bringing to them His spirit. It is there however that He uttered several of His most memorable words. There are, in fact, in the Gospel, certain scenes and talks at

the table which we cannot often enough recall. It was at the table that Christ received the worship of a fallen woman, and gave to the Pharisees of every age, that lesson of pity which still scandalizes them. It was at the table, seated elbow to elbow with companions whose shocking vulgarity was made a reproach to him, that he declared that the physician had come to heal the sick and not those that were whole.

It seems as if in these familiar discourses, so numerous, so various in the context, Christ shows himself more than usually incisive, paradoxical, surprising. Perhaps it is for this reason that several of these passages in which they are set forth are not easily explained in public, and figure only exceptionally in the current repertory of sermons.

THE one that we have before us, is, among others, very embarrassing. The reading of it frightens delicate ears. It presents itself to us with those subversive airs that have generally gained for it the honour of silence. This is to be regretted. Without doubt, this saying makes us smart and suffer, like salt falling on an open wound, but it has also a curative virtue. At bot-

tom, it is a word of love, one of the warmest and most pressing that have ever passed human lips. Let us try to get close to the heart of the sacred depths whence it arose.

LET us take up first the negative part of the proposition: Call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours. Can this be an attack against family sociability? Can it be that our family reunions are condemned? Is it possible that there is any harm in inviting our father, our brother or our children, to offer a meal to our neighbours, to go to expense to give our friends a good time? The literal sense of the text would permit this exclusive and summary interpretation. But who does not see that this would put us in conflict at the same time with the teachings and ordinary conduct of Jesus? Did he sit down at the table at the marriage of Cana which was not, surely, a gathering of the indigent and infirm, but a beautiful and joyful family festival? Christ has never forbidden any one to rejoice, or sought to interfere with the bonds of blood and affection. It could not have occurred to him to do so. Such was his respect for the family

that he has even made it the image of the Kingdom of God. We are here, then, in the presence of a particular form of speech, into which we must try to penetrate, instead of letting ourselves stop short at the beginning. There would be bad faith in rejecting a whole passage because it begins with a statement that strikes us as strange. That however is one of the reasons that have rendered our passage unpopular. A multitude of Christians, reading that first line, shake their heads, and pass on. Is it not perhaps that they may dispense with reading the lines that follow ?

No, we must not pass over them. To suppose that Christ said something inhuman, is to deceive one's self with respect to all his intentions. He does not wish to destroy our family feasts; but He wishes to remind us of their true spirit. His purpose is already indicated in the remark: *Lest they also bid thee again.*

The truth is that the family feast, like all beautiful things, can degenerate. The repast at which Christ was present was a proof of this. At the very bottom of this gathering, there was hypocrisy. Christ had been invited that he might be *watched*; it is this that is said in so many words at the beginning of the chapter.

Sitting beside this host who had transformed into a trap what ought to be a benefaction, the Son of Man seized the opportunity to speak of true hospitality, and to disengage its true meaning.

What is it to invite, to exercise hospitality?

It is to give to others an evidence of brotherhood, to open one's house to them, and to place one's self at their disposal with absolute disinterestedness.

There should not be, then, around our family tables, any egotism or calculation. He who invites to be invited, he who invites to spy upon, he who invites to make something out of the influence of a powerful companion, of the complacency of a humble guest, causes hospitality to deviate from its true end. Hospitality, as the ancient Orient well knew, is the image of the higher humanity. It effaces distances, obliterates hatreds even, and remembers only one thing: That a guest who enters our house is a man, a man whom God has sent us.

CHRIST does not condemn family festivals, but family egoism and the trafficking of hospitality.

But, when the true spirit reigns in a family reunion, there mingles with the joy of all a secret sor-

row. Woe to him who rejoices, and who forgets the disinherited, the solitary, the pariah, without fire or place. It is impossible for a Christian to be warm, without thinking of those who suffer from the cold, or for him to rejoice in the bosom of his family, without thinking of his brothers who are afflicted. They who would try to escape this sorrow as a kill-joy, can never have understood anything of the Gospel. At bottom, the Christian is one who has been crucified, but his suffering, like that of his master, is liberating; it gives lessons of pity, of humanity and impels to action.

It impels him then, at the very moment when he is receiving his father, his brother and his friends, to think that there are those wanting about his table and in his house, who would, perhaps, stand more in need of being invited than those whom he sees before him. Indeed, by the side of every Christian who takes his place at his table to receive his friends and his neighbours, there sits down an invisible guest who whispers in his ear, with an accent that can never more be forgotten: Invite the poor, the lame, the halt, the blind. . . .

Oh! I know the answer we try to make to this voice. We answer. You do not consider what you

are saying; invite all those! it would be impossible! "there are too many." And then, they would be ill at ease here. The luxury of this house would embarrass them, and would spoil their pleasure. This is not a proper setting to hold a court of miracles.

But the invisible guest continues, and, unless you are a Christian in name only, he does not cease to repeat on every occasion: Invite them, invite them!

PERMIT me to tell you what he means. To invite is to treat some one as an equal, as a brother. This is perhaps less, but it is also infinitely more than is ordinarily imagined. Most of those who read our text think of a meal at which the needy are fed. This is very commendable, but it is still not equivalent to an invitation. An invitation is before everything a mark of courtesy, a sign of esteem. You will ask: What good will these marks do to a man who is dying of hunger? I shall reply that this being is a man, and that everything that makes him remember that he is a man is as necessary to his life as the bread that he eats.

POVERTY is a misfortune, but the misfortune of misfortunes is that this accident, which is called poverty, becomes, so to speak, your substance, and that one can come through it to forget that you are a man, so as no longer to remember anything except that you are a poor man.

Blindness is a misfortune, but how much less hard is it to be blind, than to feel one's self so distinguished by his very infirmity as to cease to be in the end anything but a *blind* man, some one who is no longer even suspected of being a man.

Our way of doing good to the poor and to the infirm, reminds them of their poverty and their infirmity: our benefactions cause them to suffer, supposing that they have not, for a long time, themselves forgotten that they were something else than poor and infirm.

Invite them, says Christ, and never have words of more human import been uttered.

Maintain towards the poor man and the infirm, a courtesy, an attentiveness, find in your heart and in your love a sign that makes him recollect that he is a man. His misery is like a tomb in which his self-respect sleeps buried. It is something to re-

spect this tomb, to approach it with piety, to care for it and to keep a flower growing there; but each of these attentions is addressed to one that is dead, shows that you accept his death, and that you confirm it. Do more and do better. Remember that it is a living man that lies there under the dust, slowly amassed, of days of suffering. Breathe upon this dust, disengage the human form; speak to Lazarus and make him come forth from the shrouds that surround him, from the night that covers him!

FOLLOWING the word of God in its high spirituality, we arrive at another consequence, quite unexpected.

This poor man, this lame man, this blind man that you must invite, may sometimes be a rich man. — For the same thing happens to the rich that happens to the poor: it is forgotten that he is a man. When this rich man is bad, hard of heart, proud of his wealth, it seems natural that he should be punished because he sins. But when he is a man of feeling, compassionate, gentle to the lowly, it is quite different. But it commonly happens that he is also spoken of as rich, as if he were

only that. *He is rich*, that tells the whole story. What can he need after that? What good will it do to offer him anything? Can he not offer it to himself, and on a scale infinitely superior? He is rich, so he is passed by, and just as we carry alms to a poor man or a crown to the cemetery, in the same way we give this rich man unequivocal evidences of respect or of gratitude that are addressed only to his station. How many of these rich men are there throughout the world, of whom we have long since forgotten that they are men, thinking only of their strong-boxes? The solicitors know their names and addresses, the charitable institutions have put a favourable mark against their names; even the members of their families expect their presents, on a given date, as we expect the certain rising of the sun; but no one has ever thought that they, who provide with so much devotion for the wants of others, are alone, suffering, that they have hearts and that they are dying of inanition. Never a brotherly attention, never a simple frank word of human tenderness!

Nobody thinks of this and it is neither through wickedness nor through ingratitude, but through conviction: *they are rich!*

Well, I point them out to you, like the poor and the miserable, and, perhaps, if my words do not fall on the rocks, some of you will repent of your omissions, and will know how to find a means to repair them.

I NVITE the poor! The poor are those who live without firesides, without families. You who have a beloved home, abode of affection, however humble it may be besides, do not know what you possess. And above all you are ignorant of the sufferings of those who are alone. You do not know what it is to go out without having any one to say to you: Good-bye, will you be gone long? Or to come back without any one to welcome you and say: Oh! how late you are! The humblest fireside is a treasure in itself, and possesses a marvellous power of warming human hearts. Why then do you give it so little thought? You say: We have n't the means of receiving them. But no one asks you to go any other expense than the expense of good will and hospitality. Invite the lonely. Perhaps it would need only a little friendly interest to make better and happy the solitary individual who lives near you, who is abandoned to

himself, to the inspiration of his sadness or of his ennui. He is unhappy because he is isolated and forgotten. Let us think of those who are forgotten!

AND do you who have the means to invite your friends, to rejoice with them, to give over on certain days your hospitable house to the frolics of your children and to the playmates of your sons and daughters, do you above all think of those who are forgotten, of solitary youths far off from the paternal hearth, struggling with the difficulties of life, exposed to the temptations of the street. These are also poor. There are days that they do not know what to do with, and that they make bad use of through want of a better. Perhaps they are nothing to you and you are under no obligation to them. No worldly relationship has recommended them to your attention. I recommend them to you in the name of Him who loves youth and suffers to see so many brave hearts going astray in this dark world.

I NVITE the poor! I once saw an illustration of this command that I shall never forget. It was in a hospital, by the bed of one of the unhappiest men I have ever known. Stricken in his affections, for he had lost all the members of his family; stricken in his body, for he was dying of a frightful disease which had nailed him to his bed for many months; stricken in his beliefs, for he had no longer the happiness of guarding in his breast the hope of a better world, he was in a more miserable state than Job himself. Job could say: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"

As I sounded this distress of heart and while these shades of the soul were filling me with terror, I saw a woman enter, a nurse, bringing his supper. She rendered her service not only with great care, but with all manner of kindly words, with smiles, with questions, just as one would with a person who was quite well. In a word, she cared for the sick man, but she remembered the man, and did not treat him as an exceptional being, placed outside the world by his misfortune. When she had gone out, graciously, and bowing like a retiring visitor, I saw the emaciated countenance of the dying man light up with a smile: "I have never

been spoiled," he said, "how good it is to be a little spoiled!"

This woman had just fulfilled, perhaps without knowing it, the commandment of Jesus: she had invited the poor. To smile on those who are happy, to be gracious to those who have joy, youth, health, is good, is one of the rays of light that God sends us in this afflicted world; but to smile on those that are stricken and broken, on those who have no longer any hope, to make one's self, when one approaches them, as gracious, as cordial as possible, to carry a caress to him whom misfortune has wrung, whom death seems already to have marked with his seal, how much better and more beautiful is this! And who knows but the eternal mercy that bends close over our distresses and our ignorance, had chosen this woman to bear a message to one of the most bruised among her children?

INVITE the poor. This counsel has its application for those who possess knowledge or, in general, intellectual cultivation. Let them partake liberally with the young and the ignorant. Never is knowledge more touching or art more radiant, than when they illumine the brow of the

obscure. I am quite familiar with the fact that there are certain privileged ones of the earth who believe that this kind of good is reserved for them, that these are meats too delicate to be set before common folk. Scandalized at seeing the people walking about in the Louvre or in the halls of the Hotel de Ville, some one said to me one day: Do you think that it was for these people that Puvis de Chavannes painted his ceilings?—I don't know as a matter of fact, I said, whether it was for them that he painted them. But I know another ceiling more beautiful than are these of earth: that which at night the myriads of stars cover with their constellations, that on which according to the magnificent image of the poet:

*“ God paints the dawn, like a fresco, on the dark
wall of night.”*

THE humblest eye has a right to raise itself towards this marvel of marvels. I conclude, therefore, that beautiful things are made to be looked at by all that can see them. I even think that no one will ever be able to do anything noble enough or great enough to inspire, to

elevate, to console the masses, and that he merits the best that humanity has to offer who, having received from God the great riches of thought, turns them into bread to nourish the souls that are anhungered.

AND this remark leads me back again to Jesus. There is no more eloquent commentary on his words than his life. It is for the little ones and those that are forgotten that he has contrived his teaching. He has translated the eternal Word into words of simplicity, and, the better to enlighten hearts and to warm their hearts, he has inclined his forehead to the level of the heads of children.

Then, to complete his work and to extend it as far as his love extended, he has set up upon earth that table of God which is the very image of the heavenly kingdom. Opening his great arms, he has invited to them the bruised hearts, the poor sinners, life's vanquished ones. Towards what feast have there ever been seen the needy repairing in greater numbers, more that were lame or paralytic dragging themselves along, more blind men groping their way? How the famished of all ages have

raised themselves from the dust, to go and eat together the bread of life and to drink from a great cup of love, deep as immensity! None is excluded save him who excludes himself. And the first places are for the last, the desperate, the crushed, those whom the pitiless mechanism of the world has levelled in the mire, and cast upon the dung-hill. It seems as if, by repaying them with usury, immortal Goodness has wished to give itself free play. It says to them: Come unto me; the more you have suffered, the better do I wish to treat you. For you I will light up my father's house, for you I will kill the fatted calf; the purest of my ministers, like to the angels for pity, shall place their hands beneath your torn feet, and the better to cradle your suffering, they shall sing to it a heavenly lullaby!

INVITE the poor! The more I look at it, this simple saying fallen from the table where Christ is sitting, the more its light gleams in my eyes. It is, it is true, only a forgotten crumb; but gather it up piously; and soon, as we come to respect it, we shall recognize it as one of those sayings that possess the mysterious virtue of nourishing the multitude!



GATHER UP THE FRAGMENTS

READINGS

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much. Luke : xvi, 10.

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke : xix, 10.

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Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. John : vi, 12.

IN the setting in which we find it, this command is somewhat surprising. To concern one's self with the remains of a miraculous repast seems an exaggeration of economy. Such a repast has given nobody any trouble; why carefully husband what on the first occasion it would be so easy to produce again, entire and quite fresh? But evidently it is not right for anything to be wasted, or that the crowd, when once satisfied, should trample disdainfully on the bread that has nourished it. If it is not just, if it is contrary to command, to gratitude, to let the fragments of a miraculous feast go to waste, how much more reason should there not be for us not to squander those that are the product of painful preparation? That is why I want to talk to you about it while I

let this saying of Jesus lead me across the material domain and the spiritual domain.

I

ECONOMY is a virtue. Nay, that is not enough; economy supposes a whole garland of virtues. I hasten to add that it is greatly neglected. The thirst for immediate pleasures causes us to subscribe to other methods, and the majority of our contemporaries prefer to eat the grain in the ear than to stoop over to pick up the crumbs. — Among the common people especially economy is decried. For their masters, to whom for once they lend a willing ear, give it the worst of reputations. They would have it regarded as a sign of stupidity and egoism, and these are the stigmata in which may be recognized the base bourgeois ideal. The economical workman, — he is the seed of the patron, a capitalist in the bud, given over to sordid calculations. His care-free companion, who drinks up his week's pay on Saturday, is very much wiser and more generous than he.

And thus, from day to day, the crowd goes on,

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abandoning its solid practices, that have fallen into the rank of archaisms, to cling to hollow Utopias which have not even the advantage of being new.

WHEN we live in wealth, in ease, or even in a good ordinary manner, it is almost impossible to imagine how much energy it requires to economize in narrow circumstances. To foresee the future is easier when the present does not overwhelm you. But when concern for bread, poverty, hunger, hold you in their grasp, needs, pressing and imperious, still the voices of the morrow. To economize in the things that are necessary, to deprive yourself to-day in order to be a little less hard pressed later on, is very difficult. And above all, this presupposes vigilance and patience at every moment. Perseverance, the spirit of renunciation, temperance, firmness in the face of temptations and impulses, all this is necessary for the poor who practice economy, and, above all, they require a great love for their family. — This is the inner spring that permits them to sustain so difficult a task.

HAVE you ever, in hours of illness or of great preoccupation, performed some piece of work; undertaken, for example, some long-drawn piece of needlework, and woven your thoughts into the leaves and flowers? Through force of association, your inner experience and your work were henceforth completely identified, and after many years you could still say to yourself: this flower recalls the day when I was expecting news of my sick and absent son. I wavered between fear and hope and my hand trembled. Something of his fever has remained in this frail stem. . . . Here is a swallow that I embroidered after I had received happy tidings that reassured me and announced his near return. Never shall I be able to look at it without thinking of all the joy of which a mother's heart is capable!

The labour involved in economy is like these patient toils. The little pennies also have their story. This story is made up of watchfulness, of cares, of tenderness, of sublime sacrifices. Never will the large sums of nameless money attain to the power of signification possessed by these little pennies amassed one by one, put carefully away, to which one has said: Little penny, I keep you to-

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day in order that you may keep me to-morrow; I give you a post of honour: the day when misery approaches my sill and threatens to cross it, you will cry out: you may not pass!

ECONOMY is not, however, the appanage of the poor man alone, and, as it were, a sort of necessity of which certain persons succeed in making a virtue. Economy is a law of life. However rich and inexhaustible it may appear, nature is not prodigal. If you see it in the spring prodigal of flowers, if, in certain beings, it multiplies its seeds in profusion, it is because it foresees legions of enemies, myriads of destructive agencies that must be submerged under floods of life. But nature does nothing in excess and lets nothing be lost. If anything could be lost, annihilated without trace and without effect, it would be the most formidable infraction of the laws of being. It seems to us then that, in this immense creation, the value of the smallest things is established with as much force as that of the greatest.

Man does not violate, with impunity, rules so firmly fixed as these. Whatever may be his situation in the scale of fortune, he is subject to them,

and their infraction recoils in punishments on his head or on the heads of those that belong to him. He may not despise the crumbs because ample provision has been made for him. So many others would be happy to have what you waste! That in itself is one reason for carefulness on this score. But there is yet another, and it is within the province of your immediate interests: The man that wastes his wealth, wastes himself. — He who does not know the value of things, is ignorant of the trouble they have cost; he who does not know the price of effort and of trouble, is ignorant of the very basis of life, and wastes life. When you *save* what is in danger of perishing, you save at the same time a part of yourself.

FROM the point of view of education, no truth is more important than this. It is impossible to raise children in an environment where there is no respect for labour and money, and where, consequently, people spend without keeping any account, spoil unnecessarily, scatter the crumbs and crush them under foot with stupid carelessness. Should you ever be Croesuses, never let your children throw away a morsel of

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bread. And if the irresponsibility of their youth exposes them to this act whose consequences escape them, tell them what they have done without knowing it. You tell them many *fairy stories*, and I should abstain from criticizing you. 'The child's soul needs to be nourished by the marvellous. But it needs also to be steeped in realities; and certain humble realities are themselves the greatest marvels.

When your child throws away a piece of bread, make him pick it up again and tell him the history of that piece of bread. Tell him what has been requisite that that bread might exist. Tell him of the toils of the plowman and of the sower, under the autumn sky, inclement and changeful; the obscure bursting of the seed in the ground, the long sleep under the snow, the awakening in the spring, when the green life along the furrows makes its orisons to the sun, source of life. Describe the hope of the farmer when the corn puts forth its ears, and his anguish when the storm rises on the horizon. Do not forget the harvester who wields his scythe in the dog-day heat, and that poor prisoner of the cities, pledged to nocturnal toil in overheated cellars, the baker.

If your child heeds you, he will not throw bread away again, and you will have done something better than saving a mere scrap of food: you will have saved a man's soul. We should never sit down at the table without making this prayer: "We bless thee, O Father, for bread! It has ripened under thy sun and the toil of man. Grant we may never forget it, in order that it may nourish in us grateful and fraternal hearts."

THERE is not profit only in gathering up the fragments and respecting them, there is happiness also. Small acquisitions are those that give us the greatest pleasure. A plot of land that we buy makes us happier than an inherited estate. What might not be said on this head to young people who are starting in housekeeping, and to those who are not? You say: I have not enough to get married on. You prefer to be in easy circumstances alone, than in narrow circumstances with a wife and children. What a mistake! What you lack is not money, but the secret of economy and of happiness. You would spend less and you would spend to better purpose double than single. But if you were extraordinarily well off I should

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say to you: Take care, begin simply. And what I am afraid of for you, is not so much inconsiderate expense as that you will lose that which is worth so much more than a fine exterior. Too brilliant beginnings are harmful to happiness. Begin humbly, and increase gradually. You will love yourself better; the air of your house will not be charged with those deleterious miasmas that are exhaled by luxury and an easy life, and they whom God will give you, will find about their cradle a more wholesome and bracing atmosphere.

IT is very difficult for me to find any poetry in what it is customary to call the life of high society. When you find any grace or anything healthy in it, it is sure to be under the most simple and human form, the form that approximates the normal existence of mankind in general. I shall always pity those whom their wealth prevents from enjoying the little happinesses of life, which consist so often in making something out of nothing, in transforming into useful objects what seems like waste, in making, in their household, little domestic repetitions of the multiplication of loaves, and causing those who are not in the secret

to cry: "A miracle!" How many mothers have in the hearts of their children life-long and invaluable memories because they have known how to make with their ten fingers, for the table, for the house, for their clothing, things that had about them something of the incredible.

II

GATHER up the fragments! Let us follow this saying into the spiritual domain. I am first of all struck by the significance that it has had for human history. Of this history, what remains to us? Some fragments. By means of débris discovered in tombs, vestiges of inscriptions, worm-eaten manuscripts, a certain number of broken columns, mutilated statues, fragments of antique vases, we have succeeded in resuscitating vanished ages. From how many petty finds that the common passer-by would trample under foot, has there not been constructed that bridge that binds the present to the most distant past, over which we may pass to the country of memory, hear its voices and gather its lessons?

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IS it not by collecting fragments that the natural sciences have been able to inform us of those facts over which the profound sleep of the centuries seemed to cast an impenetrable veil? A scientist finds a bone, a piece of a bone, a fragment fallen from the feast of some troglodytic ancestor or some prehistoric carnivore. He compares this bone with a tooth, with an imprint imprisoned in the rock, and creatures long since returned to dust resume their life before his mind's eye.

Another scientist comes across the commonest, the most trivial fact. But he observes it; he goes on from it to grasp another, and getting nearer and nearer, he is put upon the road of those discoveries which drop into the feeble hands of man the governance of the most colossal forces. Recall the lid of the kettle that was observed by Stephenson and from which came all modern mechanical science; recall Franklin inventing the lightning rod by flying a kite; Newton for whom a fallen apple was the harbinger of the great law of universal gravitation. Do you remember what minutiae have been needed to succeed in surprising in its retreat the secret of the life of those infinitely small things, agents of

fermentation, of contagion, of decomposition? It was no longer a question even of fragments here, but of things in comparison with which a crumb is a vast continent, as unexplored, as shadowy as Central Africa. The name of this collector of crumbs, Pasteur, will live as that of him who discovered the New World.

I COME now to some moral and religious interpretations of our text. It has, besides, applications without number. And here first of all is one rather melancholy significance. I am thinking of the fragments and wreckage of life, of what remains to us at a certain age, when the despoiling years have passed over us. I am thinking of those whom unfortunate events, ruin, sickness or grief have reduced to living on next to nothing.

A man in full health is like a guest at a well-provided table. The wealth of his provision reassures him. He consumes and expends without regard for the cost. Sometimes he spends like a prodigal and does not appreciate his wealth. But the time comes when, of this fair warmth of blood, of this flow of spirits, of this fire of the eyes, of this

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abundance of vitality, there is left us but a shadow. It is age, it is accidents that bring us to this. We are led ever to make painful comparisons between yesterday and to-day. We must not let these comparisons become our sole occupation. Let us gather up the fragments! Let us employ carefully those vestiges of a force once so exuberant and often so little conscious of its worth and of its duty. And perhaps the fragments will become more useful than the feast. — Let us do the same, if we have lost our fortune. Life has to be begun over again many times, and always with different elements. If the waves have destroyed a splendid ship that bore your star, jump into a skiff, if the skiff founders on the reefs, cling to a plank.

BUT perhaps you have been stricken at the heart. You have loved. Your life has slowly become blended with other lives, according to the sweet and potent law that God himself has ordained. And death has come, carrying away those whom you loved, rending the bonds, snatching away your life with that of your children, your relations, of your wife or of your husband. And here you are upon the ruins. Is it indeed

you are there or some one else? There are hours when you do not know. It is no longer you, for the best part of you is sleeping in the tomb: one always dies with those one loves. And yet it is you, since you suffer and weep, and since this grief itself makes you remember that you have not ceased to exist. Gather up the fragments, poor sister, poor brother! Gather them up piously, these dear fragments of memory. Dispute with destruction what remains of those you have loved. Love them in the vestiges of their life, in the unfinished work that they have bequeathed to you, in what was purest in them, in what was most immortal in them, and you will begin to understand, by signs that God will render proportionate to your want of strength, that death is not the All-Powerful, and that it is not to it that the Reign belongs. Slowly spun by the piety of your heart, a thread, tenuous at first yet ever more resistant, will bind your heart anew to the visible world. You will feel that, if there is an element of death in our lives, if many things that one touches and takes hold of are but nothingness, there is also life in death. The dead live through those who love them. To learn to possess them in incorruptible life, and to believe in

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the mysterious promises made to those that sorrow, we must not consent that they should die in ourselves.

Gather up the fragments!

THE written Gospel which is before us, is fragments also. The happy disciples who heard Christ were at the feast itself. For us there have been gathered up a few basketfuls of what was left, out of which all man's efforts can never succeed in making a perfect whole. But what is our salvation, is that the spirit of the bread inheres in each fragment. Whoever eats of this bread (and the size of the morsel has nothing to do with it), is born into life. It seems as if God's power takes delight in the slightness of the means. Man, in his wisdom, aspires to the whole feast. Some of us would demand willingly for salvation the consumption of the whole of an entire divine repast, to which is lacking neither food nor service. How many times has it not been proclaimed that such and such spiritual foods are not the complete loaf. Surely, I am not one of those who believe that everything is good provided we eat with a hearty appetite. But the truth should be told: the least

fragment of the Gospel, the least little morsel that has fallen from the table of Christ, whether fish or bread, suffices to make the soul live and to liberate it. And this is not an exception: it is the rule, it is the permanent miracle. I take to my witness all those who have been saved from that frightful death, death by starvation of the soul! is it not by means of a fragment, often fallen by chance, that they have been saved by a word, a sign, a message weak and mutilated? but there was beneath it some mystery of eternal life which constitutes the power of germs, the strength of ferments, the catching quality of sparks. Those who apply themselves to the nurture of their souls have analagous experiences. Every day they prepare great feasts where the art of the cook shines forth, where there is meat in abundance, where wine flows in floods. They do their best, in short. And when they have taken count of their labours, there is found, here and there, some one who has retained something and profited by it. But, in the greatest number of instances, what is it from which he has derived his benefit? From some apparently insignificant remark to which you attached no importance, while you had put all your hopes in certain choice mor-

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sels which yielded nothing. Why is that? One only could tell you: the God of the fragments.

WE shall never again see the Son of man nourish the multitudes with a little bread and a few fishes. And yet, what is involved here, is less a fact dated and catalogued, than the very history of men.

Life is always the same desert, and ever the same crowd is wandering there famished with hunger. You say as you see these multitudes and these arid steppes: "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" And you forget that there is always among you Him who says: How many loaves have you?

Go to him with what you have. Carry him your poverty. These things with which misery overwhelms you, he will touch and you will no longer know them. This bread, he will break it; passing through His hands, it will acquire virtues of which you have not been aware. So long as you dispute for the bread, you will diminish it, you will break it into fragments, and with it you will break into bits your hearts. But when you break the bread of brotherhood, of goodness, of love, the more you

divide it up among you, the more there will be of it. God's power increases in him who communicates it to others.

DO not despair of your age, of your contemporaries. Look at Jesus. In the heavenly kingdom, the kingdom of mercy, of truth, the stone that the masons had rejected became the corner-stone. This was accomplished for Jesus. This was accomplished for his disciples. Looking at his disciples, Christ might have said: Who are they that they should conquer the earth? He said, on the contrary, placing his hand on the poor fisherman of the lake of Genesareth: Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! And to them all together He said: Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

It shall ever be thus. Do not say: the times are evil, the spirit no longer speaks, the multitude has gone astray, bread is wanting, and the night comes. Do you know whether those red lights that you take for the setting sun, are not the fires of some unhopèd-for dawn? But what matters it? In the

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decline of time as in its beginning, when centuries and societies come to a close, as when they commence, life is a desert, unless one puts into it what Christ brings thereto.

LET him teach us to make use of the remains, piously to gather up the fragments. Let Him give us a little love with our misery, a little hope with our poverty, a little confidence with our doubts, a little, finally, of the bread of God which gives life to the world, and we shall be able to make our brothers live; and seeing the effects of this nourishment which renders strength and affection, we shall henceforth have but one prayer: Lord, give us always of this bread.

THE WIDOW'S MITE

READINGS

There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing : there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches. Proverbs : xiii, 7.

Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee. Acts : iii, 6.

Wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the Lord ? Numbers : ix, 7.

I am small and despised : yet do I not forget thy precepts. Psalms : cxix, 141.

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. Matthew : x, 42.

THE WIDOW'S MITE

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury : and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury : For all they did cast in of their abundance ; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. Mark : xii, 41-44.*

HE was watching the crowd. What a picture and what a contrast in these two words: Christ, the crowd!—He who remains watches those who pass. The eternal assurance, the tranquil security of Him who has said: "*I am the life*," is brought face to face with what there is most variable and

* The word in the French version of the Scriptures is *crowd* (*foule*). It is necessary to adopt this rendering in the following sermon in order to catch the precise shade of Pastor Wagner's thought.

—Trans.

uncertain. And we understand that cry that escaped from His heart on an analogous occasion: I pity the multitude.

The crowd is interesting everywhere: When it is excited, tumultuous, stormy; or when it stretches out in the sun and smiles, the way a calm sea smiles on its shores. The curious crowd at the door of a theatre, thick-massed, impatient, animated with the desire to be thrilled, the crowd of patients in the reception-room of a physician, awaiting their turn and fearing it as they would fear the verdict of a judge; the crowd of intriguers and solicitors in the antechamber of a minister.

For some, the crowd is a rabble from which they turn their eyes away, the anonymous and vulgar herd; for others, it is the Book of Life, astounding, inexhaustible, turning its numberless leaves where, on every page, things sweet or terrible are read. Christ loved to watch the crowd. It said so many things to Him that the distracted observer never notices, or for which the egotistical spectator or mocker has neither heart nor eye. On the faces of the unknown, in their gestures and in their gaits, He deciphered in hundreds, in thousands of variants, the old

human history, always new, with its grandeurs and its distresses.

TO-DAY, we see Him observing the crowd at the temple. The house of God is a propitious place to study human types. Every one reveals himself by his bearing. How many different attitudes, carriages of the head, preoccupations there are that have nothing in common among them.

Some seem as though they were absorbed in the sentiment of the presence of God. Every vain human distinction is effaced in their minds, before the sovereign impression of grandeur, of holiness, of divine pity.

Others do not seem even lightly touched by this kind of thought. They have entered the holy place with all their personal self-consciousness and with banners flying, and they recall those great lords who used to enter the churches on horseback and surrounded by all their following.

The crowd that Jesus is observing is shown to us at a special moment — the moment when it is bringing its offerings. Not only do we perceive the air with which it gives, but even the gift itself. This

is like a public examination. There is nothing hidden: every one can count the sums or at least note whether it is gold that falls into the treasury, or silver, or copper.

Against the many-coloured background of this line of givers of every rank and of every mien, one form stands out: that of a widow. Christ, struck by all that His insight reveals to Him through the medium of this apparition, rests His gaze upon her. This glance has sufficed to make her immortal.

WHAT does this figure, surrounded by the Master with a soft ray of tenderness, and brought to our attention, say to us, to our pious respect?

It speaks to us *of the gift of the poor.*

The gift of the poor! By some law or other which causes things to suggest their contraries, these words make me first think of the poor who give nothing.

Among these, in the first rank, I place those whom I shall call the poor by profession. Rapacious, envious, astute; usurpers and profaners of that holy poverty that Christ has ever held in honour, you will see them always gathering to themselves, profiting by an opportunity to hold out

their hands, ever on hand at the passage of a pleasure party or of a funeral procession, to coin money from our sadness or our good humour, to derive an income from our pity or our credulity. Everything beautiful in this world has its caricature: The physician has the charlatan, the patriot has the jingo, the believer the fanatic, the virtuous man the hypocrite, and poverty has this wolf, forever hungry, this voracious shark, the beggar by profession, the only form, alas! under which so many people know misery and destitution. He receives, grasps, amasses . . . he closes his greedy hands on the alms that he receives; but he never gives anything to anybody. Far from it, he regrets what you give to others, as if you had trenched on his privilege; and if he had the power, in his hideous egoism, he would suppress the portion of others to increase his own. He would enjoin upon charitable souls this commandment, first of all: It is I who am the true, the only poor man, thou shalt have no other!

SIDE by side with these professional poor people, there are others, genuine indeed, and worthy of all sympathy, but yet who no longer give. These are the timid and discour-

aged, the ones who are so impressed by the sentiment of their poverty, that they believe themselves to be incapable of helping others or of bearing them any aid. Their deprivations oppress them to the extent of closing their eyes to so many good things that still remain to them.

To bring to a close this enumeration of the poor who give nothing, I wish still to allude to that enormous class of poor people, or simply those who occupy a humble situation in life, whom I shall call the falsely generous.

They may be recognized by this sign: they repeat incessantly: if I were rich; and more than one of us will have to admit silently to himself that he belongs to this category. — Then they say: If I were rich, I should make people happy, I should take pleasure in making amends for the cruelties of life, I should encourage good works, I should relieve old age, etc.

To those who are inclined to talk thus, admitting that they are quite sincere, as I am ready to believe, I shall say: Beware! There are two evil things in this apparently generous regret: if I were rich! First, there is criticism of others, a kind of indirect condemnation of those who *are* rich. Then,

there is eulogy of one's self, indirect, if you wish, but none the less hardy. Nothing is easier and more inconsiderate than to bestow thus, without loosening your purse-strings, an evidence of your munificence. Do you know what these Platonic liberalities of which words pay all the costs, are like? They are like the talk of certain politicians who go about saying: if I were deputy, if I were minister. This is the talk of candidates, pretenders, or crown princes anxious to be kings, in a word all those who, in order to obtain what they do not possess, do not hesitate to make promises that they will never be able to keep.

You should not say: if I were rich, my brother. What you would do in that highly improbable case, you do not in the least know. Some, when they become rich, imitate that character of Shakspeare's, who reasoned thus:

*Whiles I am a beggar, I will rail,
And say, there is no sin but to be rich;
And, being rich, my virtue then shall be,
To say, there is no vice but beggary.*

— KING JOHN, ACT II, SCENE 2.

Let us distrust those long-term promises in which there is too great a place for hypocrisy and uncertain probabilities. We must await, in order to do what ought to be done, for what is not, what perhaps never will be. Man's duty lies beneath his eyes and is justly proportioned to his powers. What tells you, you who think yourself poor, that you are not rich in means of which you are not aware, and that good will on your part will suffice to bring to light? If you are not generous now that you are poor, you will not become so when you are rich. Generosity is not a precious object that a rich man can alone afford. It is a quality of the heart. When one does not possess this quality, he possesses wealth in vain, for it remains sterile. But with this quality, the meanest gifts acquire great value.

It is this that Christ wished to teach us through the example of the widow, and it is this that the poor who give, all know.

They do not waste their time saying: if I were rich. Their hearts impel them to be good to some one, to identify themselves with the works of mercy. They deem it an honour, and the greatest of honours at that, to participate in all those cares

and labours that aim to alleviate their brother's sufferings. They know well enough that they are poor. But should they for this reason be reduced to requiring pity without themselves showing any of it? Should it be forbidden them to possess bowels of mercy? No exclusion would hurt them so much as that they should have no share in tenderness for others. They would feel insulted, put under the ban of humanity, and how well their simple intention as good kind people serves them as a guide! There are exonerations that degrade and exemptions that disgrace, because certain charges are noble and certain debts sacred. To say to a man: you shall not bear these burdens, you shall not help pay these debts, is the same as declaring that he has forfeited man's estate!

I know right well that this is one of the worst obstacles to the good will of the poor and the lowly. Some one says to them in a patronizing tone: You, you are too poor, we ask nothing of you. Keep your gifts for yourselves. And he does not see that he wounds them, that he classes them among the incapable, the parasites, the irresponsible! Oh, the blind and overweening pride of this practice! What gratuitous insult could be worse than to

refuse the gift of the poor, from a sense of humanity!

AT other times, we deign to accept his gift; but we despise it. And here we are nearly all guilty, although in different degrees. Can I refrain from speaking of the evil spirit that reigns in certain good works where people of small means are coldly treated? There is even a special kind of arrogance, that develops in charitable undertakings that are accessible only to persons of high station. In this institution there is carried on an aristocratic charity whose distinction would be tarnished by too humble contributions. And if, peradventure, there strays into them some person of modest rank, he feels ill at ease, surrounded by cold regards; and, like the guest that wore no wedding garment, he feels levelled at him the question: "My friend, how did you get in here?"

WE are familiar with a special kind of materialism, one of the worst that this mental tendency has produced: it is the materialism of the seekers of subscriptions. This materialism consists in having a superstitious re-

gard for great sums, and disdain for small ones. Those who are afflicted with it notice nothing but what they can handle and express in figures.

I do not wish to say anything ill of figures, or to criticise a gift because it is large. This would be unjust and absurd. Nothing in our text, nor any word of Christ authorizes us to cast discredit upon those that give much. But it is not the sum that counts, it is the spirit that is put into it, the part of one's self that it represents. And this part, figures do not indicate.

Let us not be men of figures when gifts and offerings are concerned, for the domain of figures is limited.

In finance, a figure is a figure. Two equal numbers have the same value, and a hundred dollars are twice fifty and twenty times as much as five dollars. But when intentions are involved, it is another matter: then the value of the figures depends no longer upon their size. This is what Jesus causes us to observe. Beware of neglecting the little pennies; there are pennies that are poems, there are pennies that have a soul.

I picture to myself the guardians set over the treasure of the temple, counting, after the departure of the crowd, the money collected in the treasury. They pile up the pieces of gold, the pieces of silver, the big copper coins. Then, the count made, they perceive that there remain on the table two little coppers that they had overlooked, worth together about a quarter of a cent. I see them, these twin pieces, in the white hand, starred with rings, of a Jewish notable, and I hear him say: let us return to the treasury this fraction of a cent until it makes a whole cent.

O mystery of the wisdom of God, before which human wisdom is only a blind leader. This fraction that the accountant will not even carry on his book is inscribed somewhere in letters of light on another book, a book in which the brutal figure is no longer the only measure by which are valued the treasures that the world cannot see. There, poor widow's mite, you shine with all the splendour that is given to even the least gift by the only thing that is truly a perfect offering: the gift of one's self.

SOMETHING happened last winter, in Paris, that I shall place side by side with the mite of the Gospel. You will remark the profound analogy, the close spiritual kinship of these two cases.

In the icy north wind of December a shelter was raised where warm soup was given to the unfortunate. A very old woman, who had long awaited her turn, at length sat down and was served. Before she touched her portion, she noticed that a young robust workingman beside her, had already consumed his with an avidity that betrayed that he was famished. At once she pushed her plate towards the workman and said to him: I am not hungry, will you eat this? The workman accepted.

. . . But some one had noticed all that had passed. As they went out, he took the old woman aside and said to her: You were not hungry then? — Oh, yes, she answered blushing, but I am old and can bear it, and that poor young man was more in need of it than I.

My brothers, the goods for which men grow jealous, dispute, pounce upon their quarry, will return to dust with those who have coveted them; but should the whole visible world perish, when

the last star in the infinite cold had extinguished its last ray, acts like this would remain, with all their sublimity, streaming resplendent into the very bosom of immortality!

THE importance of the gift of the poor does not reside, however, in its mere intention. It resides also in its infinite repetition. These petty acts added up, give an enormous total in the end.

Surely, many miseries owe their alleviation to the charity of the rich, to the resources accumulated by them in a great multitude of works both public and private. But these beautiful efforts, of which enough could not be said, represent only the smallest part of the good that is done wherever those that are in misery mutually aid and sustain each other. It is the same with the work of mercy in the world as with a vigorous tree. This tree needs, in order to sustain and nourish itself in the earth, great roots. But these roots would not prevent it from perishing if it were denuded of that legion of little slender roots that are called capillary roots. The poor who give to the poor, the indigent who take care of their sick neighbours, the famil-

ies in narrow circumstances that assume the charge of a child, all who break bread with those still more unfortunate than themselves, all who efface an obscure tear or strengthen a weakened will, fulfill the function of the capillary roots.

One is never too small to do good. This should never be forgotten, since it is only too evident that one is never too small to do evil.

The gift of the poor has its place in the spiritual world.

JESUS say, that the widow gave more than riches. Transporting ourselves into the domain of the spirit, his words remain true. The poor, the afflicted, all those who suffer and weep, have in them a helpful and consolatory virtue superior to that of those who are happy. God has willed it thus. He has made himself a man in order to speak to men, and every day he becomes lowly and little in order to penetrate into places where our human greatness and our wisdom lose their foothold. That he reveals himself in the strong, in minds of great scope, that he spreads broadcast his gifts through the intermediation of

those whom he has made rich in all sorts of high qualities, I do not deny. But what is best in all these who are rich, is the poor man that is in them; what is purest in them comes to them out of their misery. If they had never wanted anything, if they had never suffered privations, renderings, doubts, where would their gifts be, and how would they understand the human heart?

And besides, consider their number: they are too few. Too few to go to all those who have need of the help of God. It is for this reason that eternal mercy has, that it may reveal itself, legions of humble messengers, and reveals itself by preference in lives forgotten and unknown. Never say, then: Who am I to save a soul, to bring light to a heart where darkness reigns? Above all do not say: Suffering and miserable myself, what can I do for those who weep? Unless you do this very thing you will become a spiritual mendicant. For there are those, and they are far too many, to whom their moral misery has taught but one thing: to hold out their hand, to call for help, to groan along the roads and at the sills of doors. Exclusively sensible of their own personal misery, they do not see that of others. Their poverty remains sterile, parasiti-

cal, and becomes a source of demoralization. They are in life like those in danger of being drowned, who, instead of making efforts to help themselves, cling to their neighbours, in equal danger, and drag them to the bottom.

LET us understand life better, let us raise our hearts to the height of that sublime duty which consists in doing for others the little of which we are capable, and in the accomplishment of which shines forth the richness of God.

In short, all men are poor in one way or another. God sends us who are infirm, to others who are infirm. We are like those wounded men who, fallen one after another on the field of battle, care mutually for each other, share their rations, and help each other to live or to die. This is life. We must take it as it is and derive the best from it that we can. And this counsel is applicable even to those who are poor in spiritual life, to whom powerful faith is lacking, and who, instead of fair virtues, have a great number of faults, like the majority of us, no doubt. If you wait until you have the faith that moves mountains, the patience of the

saints, the purity of the angels, to render yourselves useful, you will let your life slip by with waiting till you are ready. Try rather to be good in spite of what you lack. A man who goes limping along the road of God, or who even crawls along, seems to me more affecting than he who travels it with firm and healthy step.

WHO said then that the Gospel is discouraging? Ah surely, the goal is distant and the ideal appears inaccessible; but to approach it, there is no humble effort that is not acceptable. Give then, as the widow gave. Do not be ashamed of your poverty, and do not permit it to overwhelm you. Do not remain hidden within the narrow limits of your needy life, or lying inert by the roadside. Go out to God, go out to men; offer them your misery, offer yourself. If you do that, you will have done more than those who give only of their superfluity. But you will not think of comparing yourself to others. Christ, your Saviour, did not wish to arouse in the poor the pride of his mite. He wished only to encourage those who regret having too little to offer. And what a moment he chose for that!

It was in the last days of his career, facing the lost world; he asked himself more than ever what could be done to save it. And when he saw this widow who gave all that she possessed, all that she had to live on, he recognized in her the symbol of the law of salvation, of that law that he himself was preparing to follow unto death: To love, and to give what one has. And it is thus that the widow's mite appears to us, joined by a mysterious tie, to the offering of Calvary.

SPEAK FOR THE DUMB

READINGS

Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in thee, O Lord, do I hope : thou wilt hear, O Lord my God. Psalms : xxxviii, 14, 15.

I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor : and the cause which I knew not I searched out. Job : xxix, 15, 16.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. I Corinthians : xii, 27.

And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted. . . . Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. Ephesians : iv, 32 and v, 1, 2.

And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. Genesis : xviii, 26.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah : liii, 5.

SPEAK FOR THE DUMB

Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Proverbs : xxxi, 8.

OPEN thy mouth for the dumb. I love these words, because they are very old and sweet: old as the ills from which poor humanity suffers, sweet as the pity which relieves and makes them reparation. I wish to take them first in their simple and direct sense, and then to draw from them some more remote consequences.

He who wrote these words, was thinking of the defence of some one who could not defend himself. The dumb man is without arms before the accuser; he can neither reply, nor justify himself. His situation is terrible. Will nobody speak for him? To the honour of humanity, it is his very infirmity that defends him, it is his weakness that becomes his buckler. An obscure command of conscience,

which gives at the same time orders and the force necessary to execute them, cries to every man: speak for the dumb, do not let him be insulted or ill-treated. And by dumb, it is not necessary to understand only him who is deprived of speech, but him also who is too infirm, too timid, too unintelligent to raise his voice, or, him, again, whom duty obliges to remain silent. One of the greatest forms of cowardice consists in attacking those who, bound by professional secrecy, by the priesthood or by fatal circumstances, cannot respond. We must speak for them, write for them, cry for them. Here we have a noble use for that speech which we debase every day by our abuses. How many useless conversations, how many wicked speeches, how many empty sounds in human existence! Speak for the dumb, this is the best thing you can do with your tongue.

THE meaning of this counsel may be modified quite naturally and becomes in turn: Listen for the deaf, look for the blind, speak for the dumb!

Those who enjoy the normal use of a faculty do not generally think of congratulating themselves

upon it. But in the vicinity of the infirm one learns to recognize the value of health.

FOR him who hears, most conversations seem commonplace. In the greatest number he finds neither charm nor salt. Sometimes he is so tired of them that he longs for silence. Thus we despise flowers at the season when every garden, every field, and hedges, abound with them. But if you found a flower in winter, or a clump of grass or of trees in the middle of a desert, it would be quite another thing! — The deaf man is condemned to silence. He is surrounded as by an abyss. In the midst of society, he is alone, more alone than when he has nobody near him. Those forms that he sees, those gestures, those various signs exchanged, mean nothing to him. He knows neither why some one shrugs his shoulders, nor what suddenly makes faces grow serious, nor what they are laughing at. Can it be that they are laughing at him? Such a situation is extremely painful. Thus the deaf man dedicates a touching gratitude to him who takes the trouble to enable him to catch a few scraps of conversation, and to raise the interdict that weighs upon him. The slightest word

surprises him, lights up his face, distracts his poor soul given over to the fixed idea of solitude. It is almost impossible to imagine the good that one can do by hearing for the deaf.

SEE for the blind.

I have known blind men who derived extraordinary satisfaction from being on top of a high mountain or facing a beautiful view. This seems surprising, but it is very natural. Have they not about them the mountain air, do they not feel the warm light of the sun which gives such a lively sensation of well-being? But this landscape that they can feel about them, they cannot see. Then, see it for them. Describe it! There is no work more interesting or better repaid than that which consists in describing a landscape to a blind man, especially if he has formerly been able to see and knows, from memory, what a colour is, a lighted form.

The blind man to whom you describe an actual landscape, is infinitely more entranced than the man who sees clearly and to whom you describe from memory the sites of a beautiful distant country. For the one who sees is always distracted by

some object under his eyes and which is in rivalry with the interior image. And you yourself, you are painting from memory. But when you describe to a blind man what strikes you on the very instant, you really give him the illusion of light. He sees through your eyes. There is in his soul both light and colour. The green swell of the forest, the yellow waves of the harvests, that stream that unrolls yonder, across the fields, like a ribbon of silver; that river whose waters are transmuted into liquid gold in the brazier of the setting sun, all this shines before his inward eye. And yet it is not this that most delights the blind man. What moves him, transports him, not only if he is your father, your son, your friend, but even a simple travelling companion, is that he sees through you, that, for an hour, you realize the holy law that man owes himself to man, and that he lives above all by your bounty and fraternal exchange. And what he experiences, you will experience under another guise: God blesses that light which is in your eyes and that you have lent to the blind man. He makes you happy with the happiness that you procure; and of this spectacle upon which you look for another, you will not only lose nothing, but it

is far more beautiful than if you had looked at it alone.

II

FROM the domain of bodily infirmities, let us now pass, by a transition clearly indicated, to moral infirmities. Here, the words: speak for the dumb, listen for the deaf, see for the blind, will take on a broader signification.

EVERY gift of the mind, every quality of the heart is a force that should have its function in the whole of which we are members, and to supplement there the weaknesses, the insufficiencies of others. There is not a single human quality that is not wanting in many men. It is incumbent upon those who possess this quality to exercise it on behalf of those who do not possess it. I am going to formulate a few brief counsels, in order to begin to give a little body to an idea, seemingly commonplace, but at bottom very foreign to our current conceptions and our practices. Here they are:

Be good, in order to remedy the wickedness of

the wicked, to make amends for it and to atone for it.

Be pious, in order to counterbalance the impiety of the impious, to make amends for it and to atone for it.

Be pure, in order to combat the impurity of the impure, to make amends for it, to atone for it.

Be big-hearted, in order to make up for the narrowness of the sectaries, to make amends for it, to atone for it.

Be firm, in order to correct the frailty of weak characters, to make amends for it, to atone for it.

WE are, here, in the full current of a collective morality very far from the restricted domain of individualism, in the midst of laws that envelop us, but that we ignore. It is one of the gravest of errors to say that one cannot do good in the stead of others, as one cannot eat for others. In the first place, however singular it may seem, I declare that one can eat for another. The soldier who defends his country, the nurse who watches by our bedside, every man pledged to the service of others and fulfilling a function useful to the whole community, eats not

for himself alone, just as he does not live only for himself. It is for you, for me that he eats, sleeps, and strengthens himself. If he should falter at his post, through lack of sustenance, it is we who would suffer for it. It is then possible to eat for others, and it is possible to do good in the stead of others. When evil occurs, we stigmatize it, we condemn it, we despise it, sometimes also we imitate it. But evil does not arouse us to do good.

This is not as it should be, it is contrary to the profound law that should govern all our conduct. When we see a blind man, we have this impression: His light is lacking, we must make up for its absence, we must see clearly for him who is in the shades. But when we meet with a bad man, we add to his wickedness.

Example: You are thoroughly well-disposed, full of excellent intentions, and you address a kindly question to some one. This some one is brusque, incensed, and returns you an evil answer. At once you change your tone, and you make yourself his echo, and think you have done well. You would think you had failed in your duty if you had returned good for evil. I neither accuse you nor condemn you, and it would even be very diffi-

cult for me to tell you how well I understand you.

But if your procedure is comprehensible, it is not for that reason wise or practical; if it justifies itself to vulgar reasoning and petty right, it does not stand calm and disinterested examination. Let us see: Do you renounce the use of speech because you meet a mute, or the use of your limbs because you meet a paralytic? Why then do you abandon your good humour and your cordiality when you come into contact with an ill-mannered person or merely a chronic grumbler. Perhaps you find it contrary to your dignity, humiliating, to permit yourself to become abusive. But cannot it be affirmed, taking a more elevated view of the matter, that dignity consists in being one's self and remaining so, and that, if there is anything humiliating, it is for one to suffer his disposition and even the sound of his voice to become changed by the first comer? Let us accustom ourselves to this perfectly simple rule: It is better, in life, to bring what is lacking than to add still more to what already abounds. But, when people say all sorts of disagreeable and unjust things to you, it is evident that what abounds is injustice, bad faith and bad

humour. Why add still more to these things, since there is already too much of them; bring rather what is lacking.

A little scene of child-life has often seemed to me to contain the most touching lesson for men. A child knows when it receives a service from any one that it should say thank you. But, often, when a child renders us a service, we forget to thank it. After having waited in vain for the little word which should be pronounced, it then itself says: "Thank you," and goes its way. The child has a feeling that something ought to happen and does not: then, he takes charge of it himself.

If we understood the greatness of this lesson, the world would get along better, and we should not be more violent than the violent, more crafty than the crafty, letting ourselves be drawn successively through every metamorphosis, to the greatest detriment of our conduct and of that of our fellows.

We do not take sufficient account of all we can do for others. I recall a few instances to your memories: If there is anything personal and intimate, it is courage. It would appear to be impossible to have it for others, to exert will in their place, since

this demands personal determination. However, every one has experienced what it means for our will to have the support of a secure, friendly will, which sustains us at critical moments. And this support never remains external, it becomes transformed: the strength does not maintain the status of a foreign aid, it becomes our strength. Like a generous wine or a strengthening food, it enters into us, becomes transformed into our substance and blood, flows in our veins, beats in our breast, sparkles in our eyes. Speech even and direct contact are not necessary to produce this result; it may be produced at a distance, and without the knowledge of those to whom we owe it. The face of a passer-by, a great grief bravely borne, an act of patience or of justice of which we happen to know, inspire us and give us life, sound across our soul the awakening of all the good forces asleep within us.

You are struggling with difficulties, your look is troubled and your good will as well. One of those painful moments of strife and discouragement, when man is no longer anything but the shadow of himself, is passing over you. In these circumstances a newspaper falls into your hands. In it you read that, on such and such a day, in the heart of Africa,

surprised by an ambushade, surrounded by enemies in superior numbers, an officer, who does not speak your language and who is not fighting for your cause, has kept calm; that, the better to show his tranquil resolution, he has, at a moment like that, before his troops, hemmed in, lost, lighted his cigar, recalled in few words the memory of the fatherland and the duty of a soldier; and then marched towards the enemy and to certain death.

— It is all told in three lines. And when you have read it, you arise, you come out of your depression, you organize your resistance; you look your trouble in the face, you feel high spirits, virility, a certain generous ardour for the strife. And all this life, this precious elasticity of courage that animates you, you owe to those who are unknown to you, to the vanquished, and to the dead lying out yonder without burial and without name. What a proof of what we can do for each other!

IN epochs of intellectual disquietude and moral disintegration, what should we teach our youth and preach to the crowd? It is a question of the highest interest; but the answer is often difficult. What we have just said can per-

haps help to put us on the road. Since there is incertitude in minds, and the gait of the majority becomes vacillating, be firm for those who lack firmness, vigilant for those who sleep. Bring that which is wanting. It results from this summary indication that when public morality becomes lower, we should not be content with an average virtue sufficient for ourselves. The hour has come then for a man to re-enforce his energy, to gird up his loins, to be pure, truthful, upright, sure of himself and of his way, as if he had to furnish all these qualities for those who do not possess them. The more the moral temperature goes down about you, the more you will need to feed the inner flame.

YOU will ask me, perhaps, what good so much interior life, fidelity, strictness towards one's self can do, in the midst of a society given over to dissipations and all backsliding?

Let me tell you that the invisible treasures are not for this reason inactive. What road do the germs of epidemics, murderous microbes, all deadly contagions, pass by? You do not know. Imperceptible causes are at work, and when you

are aware of them the evil is already done. The profound sources of good lie hidden, like those of evil. What an obscure malefactor meditates to-day in the silence of the night, in a prison cell, may break out to-morrow in the domain of public life, to draw other minds along with it, to sow disorder and ruin. And what a sound and loving heart prepares modestly in its retreat, can become a point of departure for an awakening of the public conscience. The balance into which the actions and the thoughts of men fall is too mysterious, is too hidden from our view, for it to be given to us to judge always with what weight our aspirations, our efforts and our sufferings weigh there, but nothing escapes it. By some mysterious correspondence, impossible for us to grasp, all that a human creature does for others, profits them or harms them.

THE obscure sentiment of these relationships, of these compensations, of this need of equilibrium, has often, in history, inspired the most heroic acts. They have not always been understood. Sometimes the world has judged them eccentric, as it has judged certain

monastic exaggerations. It did not feel that, under these shocking forms of life, these ascetic existences, these macerations, these formidable impulses in an even intellectual direction — either a form of art, or of literature, or of custom — there was a tendency to re-establish a disturbed equilibrium. The rigidity of Calvin had its reason in the laxity of morals; the poverty of Saint Francis, in the insensate ostentation of his contemporaries. The strict temperance and abstinence of some finds its cause in the intemperance and vices of others. There must always, the poet has said, be some to pray for those who never pray at all, and are not all these manifestations of the profound solidarity of mankind, so many repeated lessons of that cohesion which the Prophets enunciated, which Christ sustained, and by which the welfare of the world is painfully accomplished?

AH, I know it well, that is one of the most violent trials for our daily reason, and it will never be possible to estimate by what cruel experiences, by what struggles, humanity has had to pass, in order to arrive at the point of producing and understanding words like those of Isa-

iah: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

In the eyes of simple human justice, there is no worse atrocity than to punish the innocent for the guilty and to extend to the guilty the justice of the innocent. But are we not obliged to recognize, in spite of this, that life does not correspond to our idea of justice? It is not the one who does wrong who suffers most from it, or the one who does good who derives the most profit from it. At every moment, the compartment in which we enclose the human being alone with the consequences of his actions, is broken down and the evil as well as the good spreads beyond its authors.

Should we not recognize, after that, that our little individualistic standard of measurement is not enough to measure the moral universe; that we cannot separate the loss and salvation of one man, from the loss and salvation of others; that there is less distance than we think between "me" and "thee;" that the "other" is to some extent ourselves, and that "we" is to some extent "him?"

Regrettable abuses have prevented this truth from making its way.

WE all remember the struggle against indulgences, which became in Germany the point of departure for the Reformation. The sellers of indulgences said that a treasure has been amassed by the virtues and sufferings of Christ, by the constancy of the martyrs and the merit of the saints, and that this treasure served to offer to sinners of all sorts the means of atoning for their evil lives. Working on this principle, the sale of indulgences for money was authorized. And since that epoch, there has been in the world, as it were, a sort of reproach on this doctrine, that the merit of another can be attributed to us. — We have become, more than ever, partisans of individual justice, and the worth of every one appears to us distinct, as his lot seems to us isolated. In this we are strangely deceived. Certainly it is wrong to sell what God gives, and to make money out of crimes, of repentance or of virtue, as if the kingdom of God were a market-place. But the most obvious fact of history is, that the faults and merits of others are our faults and

our merits. We carry the burden of sins that we have not committed, and inherit the advantages of a virtue that has cost us no effort. Every day we pay for each other.

IN one of its most celebrated passages, the Old Testament says that the terrible consequences of evil extend unto the fourth, and those of good to the thousandth generation. This is no arbitrary dogma, but the statement of a fact that we must recognize and that is at once terrible and consoling. Our century is inclined to retain only the sombre side of it. The ancient doctrine of original sin and of hereditary perversion has been transformed into a scientific theory of a terrifying gravity and discouraging fatalism, and, struck by the power of evil, we lose the benefit of the gentle law which compensates and corrects the dread law. — Let us return to that law which is outlined in the ancient alliance, which is revealed in all its strength in the new alliance: the world is redeemed by the sufferings and merit of the Just; and the Just is not Christ alone, it is holy humanity in living communion with Him. He has repeated it to us enough.

WHAT would become of society without the salt which penetrates it and prevents its decay? What would become, under its old burden of miseries, of ill-omened heredities, of secular corruptions, of poor humanity, if there did not circulate in its veins a generous virus, capable of combatting all corruptions? Long ago it would have succumbed to them. But a world where Jesus is possible cannot perish. In the ardent fire of the life that he has revealed to us, all impurities will be consumed. That is something with which to revive courage and to inflame zeal. Let us associate ourselves with the work of salvation, and let the flame that Christ came to kindle, burn in us. Let us be His! Let Him dwell in us, let His spirit stir in our hearts and be felt in our hands! Let us no longer pay any attention to the difficulties of the age, to the lowering of the moral level, to the diminution of faith. Let us speak for the dumb, see for the blind, walk for the paralytic!

BELIEVERS, do not exclude the incredulous, believe for them; do not judge the wicked, do not condemn him, do not despair of him; smite your own breast for the evil that he has done, and do in his stead the good that he knows not. This is the best arm for the combat, the secret of the great victories. If we had faith as great, as big as a mustard seed, we should learn what heaven is when it is really active, and of what inertias, of what contrary ferments it can get the best. We should learn with what weight the life of a single just man weighs in the eternal balance, and that a few pure lives in which shines the love of God and of their brothers, are all that are needed to regenerate a people, to efface the iniquity of a whole Sodom!

**I HAVE LEARNED TO BE
CONTENT**

READINGS

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans : viii, 37, 38, 39.

Lift not up your horn on high : speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge : he putteth down one, and setteth up another. Psalms : lxxv, 5-8.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. I Timothy : vi, 6.

I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT

For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Philippians iv, 11, 12, 13.

WHAT kind of contentment is here in question? It is neither that of the satisfied, nor that of the resigned.

The satisfied have no voice in the chapter. A man who is content only because all goes well with him, is not qualified to set himself up as an example to others. There is harshness of heart and stupidity, when one is in good health, rich, happy, in saying to the sick, to the poor, to the afflicted: do as I do.

No more is it a question of resignation. To accept a situation does not signify contentment.

There is besides a bad form of resignation which is only apathy and unrestraint. These falsely resigned persons, ready for all, done with all, whom nothing any longer astonishes, or revolts, are too numerous. They are the worst vanquished. We should never be resigned to being bad, mediocre, oppressed, or even unhappy, when we may aspire to better. Christ, at the end of his prayer, gathers up all his hope in God and all his confidence, in these words which seem to lift all the chains, all the yokes, all the burdens of humanity: *deliver us from evil* ! We are not then permitted to interpret the words: "thy will be done," as a maxim equivalent to the: "it was written" of the Mussulmans, and to say: "all that happens must happen, all that is done is well done. Let us accept the world as it is, our situation or our temperament as they are, and let us not try to change them in any respect."

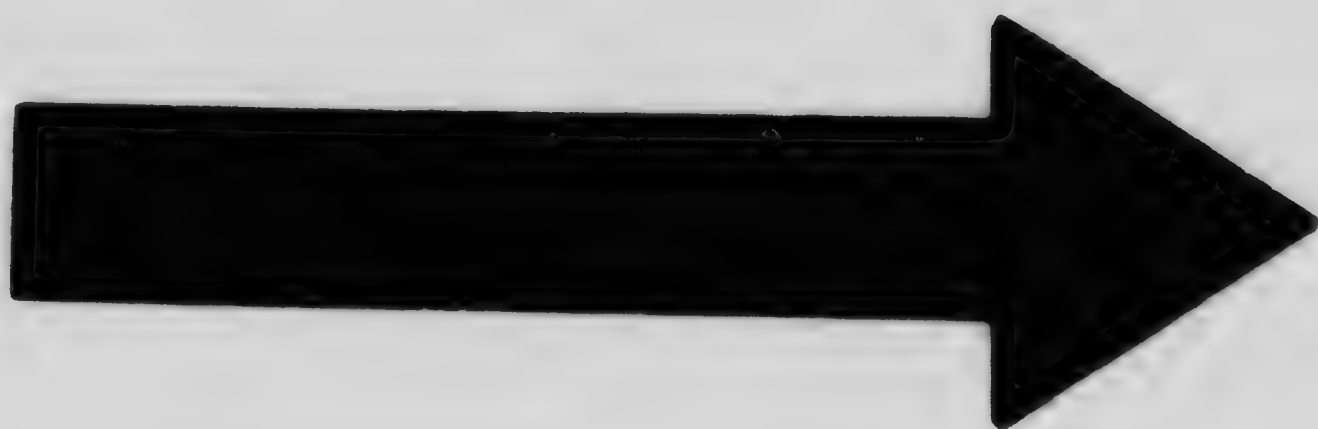
To look at the matter more closely, the Christian is rather a malcontent. But he is not a professional malcontent. The professional malcontent does not believe in the good, does not strive to attain it, and criticises nothing with more bitterness than attempts at amelioration. He lives in his dis-

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content as a fish does in water, and like certain political parties, in opposition for its own sake. If you deprive him of his cause of complaint, it is as if you had deprived him of his reason for existence.

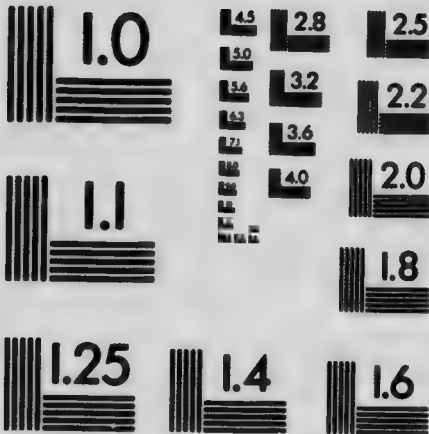
THE Christian is a malcontent who believes in the best. The contentment that he succeeds in achieving does not consist in shaping himself to circumstances like the dough to the kneading trough, but in triumphing over circumstances and in standing upright in spite of them. The word itself indicates this: content means "self-contained." To be content with this contentment is to assert and to maintain one's self in the midst of change; to stamp the pre-eminence of the internal power and of the spiritual life on the external forms of existence.

This contentment, in a vacillating and fleeting world like our own, is the science of sciences, the science of divine equilibrium. It is possible to rest one's weight on a natural gift with a feeling of firmness and serenity. And surely, those who have received from God this happy gift of knowing how to find themselves and to keep clear of entanglements in the midst of difficulties and obstacles,



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possess one of the most precious of treasures, a treasure by which their neighbours profit no less than themselves. It is not of this natural gift, however, beautiful as it may be, that our text wishes to speak. It is concerned with a conquest. Saint Paul says: I have learned. His contentment is not a heritage. He has painfully acquired it in the school, and what a school! The life of this man offers us examples of all that is high and of all that is low, of all greatness and of all humiliations, of all the rarest emotions of happiness, as well as of all the sharpest temptations of misfortune. The brilliant reputation and precocious popularity of the young Pharisee, the intoxication of knowledge and of influence, confidence in himself, in his wisdom and in his belief to the point of fanaticism. Then, interior perturbation, storms of the conscience, shipwreck of what had seemed to him most certain, birth into a new faith, long solitude of the soul. Recall to action, struggles for God and his Christ, marvellous conquests, battles, wounds, persecutions, imprisonment. Among the brothers in Jesus, among the children of the spirit, treated like a venerated father, a messenger of God: elsewhere, discoloured, spat upon, stoned. To-day rich in all

that love offered him in abundance: to-morrow poor, exposed to every privation. And perhaps more profoundly felt than all this, the mysterious fluctuations of the life of the soul, that unfathomable abyss where luminous days alternate with black nights. No one, better than Saint Paul, has known the inner sadnesses and ravishments, the great forces and the great miseries. And speaking of life, he might have said what the poet said, speaking of the sea:

"I have drunk of its tenderness and eaten of its terror."

There is the man who has the right to speak and to teach, for he has learned.

But he does not content himself with saying: I have learned; for he has, more than any one else, experienced the fact that knowledge is not enough. He says: I can. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. By my own efforts I have learned; by God's power, I can. By something that is greater than poverty, I know how to be poor; by something that is greater than riches, I know how to abound. This alliance of human labour and God's help, ought never to be forgotten!

WHAT we most need, is to learn how to remain by God's power the masters of circumstances, instead of being their slaves.

He who is poor and does not know how to be poor, is the slave of poverty. He drags it about like a ball at his ankle, he is afflicted by it as if it were a hump; he tastes all its miseries, he exhausts all its disgraces. But its holiness, its beauty, its happy obscurity, he will never know.

He who is rich and does not know how to be rich is the slave of his wealth. He employs it as a brigand his booty, he covers himself with it as with a disguise, he drowns himself in it, and these two slaves are different only in their livery. That is what is not ordinarily discerned. The common run of mortals fancy that what makes the rich man is his wealth, and that what makes the poor man is his poverty. What a puerile and superficial judgment! Is it the brush that makes the painter, and the bow that makes the musician? In the same way, it is not enough to be poor in order to make use of poverty, and rich in order to employ your wealth to advantage.

A POOR man who is a man, without envy as without servility, who arranges his life according to his needs, derives a great deal from his slender means, and, feeling the worth of his dignity, remains respectful of that of others, knows how to be poor. Nothing is more admirable, nothing is more rare. I shall say as much for a rich man who is a man, who despises nobody, is familiar with pity and does not commit the vulgar error of confounding himself with what he possesses and estimating himself exactly at the weight of his fortune. What is a rich man who falls into this error, and to what shall we compare him, unless it be a picture whose frame constitutes its whole value? Let the hammer of adverse fate break the frame, the picture is no longer worth anything. But if the picture be valuable in itself, the loss of the frame is no longer anything more than an accident of secondary importance.

HERE we touch on a point, the most delicate of all. If it is difficult to know how to be poor or rich, it is still more difficult to know how to be poor when you have been rich, or rich when you have been poor.

What a calamity it is for a man to lose his fortune, when his whole life has consisted in his carriages, his stables, his table, his clothes, his titles, the dinners that he gave and the relationships that he cultivated. He is a man overboard, and a man who is lost. In a day's time, he loses all his dignity, descends to the rank of an obsequious parasite and of a shameless beggar.

And the poor man who becomes rich by a stroke of luck, if he has not learned to be poor, will not know how to be rich. In a day, he will forget his past, his friends, his brothers. He will despise them with consummate cynicism. His vanity will know no bounds, and his caprices will find no check. His brilliant situation will be for him only a surer and more odious means of revealing his base soul and his degrading tastes.

NOTHING is more instructive in this regard than the study of troublous times, of revolutions, of wars, of social commotions, which make profound changes in the respective situations of men, disturb the strata of population, and often cast to the surface what lay on the bottom, while they precipitate to the bottom what

was formerly on the top. It is then that may be seen what stuff a man is made of, and what he is worth in himself. Sudden wealth and quickly acquired power, just as accidental and unexpected poverty, permit us to see characters as through a magnifying glass. Their qualities and their defects suddenly take on colossal proportions. Never is man more ugly, more hateful, more frightful. Never does the brute that slumbers in him awake with gestures more menacing and with actions more monstrous. Never also do the germs of virtue and heroism so greatly develop; never is man more holy, greater, more touching!

JUST as certain wines do not stand shocks and voyages, there are some men, and these are in the majority, who do not stand the upsets of fortune. The ordeal of abundance or of famine, of elevation or of abasement is fatal to them. In truth, one must needs be of extraordinary temper not to succumb; human strength is not enough, God's strength is necessary. We have seen in our time men who, at the summit of power, have moulded humanity as a potter his clay, displayed

for the crushing of their adversaries a will of iron, an eagle eye, astonished the world by an energy that seemed invincible. Fallen from power, they have presented us the painful spectacle of every weakness of character, of every triviality. The retreat and the fall that have ennobled so many others, have made them seem below the common stature. They who had so often inflicted this fate upon others, did not themselves know how to be vanquished. They lacked, in short, true force of character, that which is capable equally of rendering us mild in victory and of sustaining us in defeat.

THE trend of our ideas leads us on to speak of power. Let us pause here an instant. Saint Paul says: I know how to abound and I know how to be lowly; which is equivalent to saying: I know how to command and I know how to obey.

What is it to command? Does it consist in making those like ourselves bend under the yoke of our domination, in holding them as fallen wrestlers are held to earth, by placing our heel upon their neck? To break down a door with an axe, to cut a knot

with the sword, to open buds with rough fingers—this we do not call opening a door, solving a problem, aiding development; and tyranny is not the art of command. The violent and the oppressors, all those who thunder, threaten, have never known what that subtle, spiritual, incomprehensible force is, which is called moral ascendancy and without which there is no commanding. It is in this that inheres royalty, the secret of power, the investiture that alone confers real rights. Those who possess it, command by the grace of God, should they have neither titles, nor mandates, nor any human legitimization. But they do not command in their own name, they command in the name of justice that is greater than they. In short, they obey while they command, and give, while they exact it, the example of submission. It is not to them that we submit; we associate ourselves rather with their obedience. A man who commands thus is never more humble than when he is giving an order, for at this very moment he bows, curbed by the majesty of his conscience, and the movement of his soul communicates itself to other souls. To know how to command, is to know how to obey, and to reveal to others the secret of obedience.

THAT is what tyrants do not know. They do not know how to command, because they do not know how to obey. Wherever they appear, the arbitrary spirit that animates them, the hatred and ferocity that stir their blood, communicate themselves to those whom they claim to lead. One word from them, one gesture, one look, suffices to awaken in the heart of man the sleeping reptiles of the basest and most sinister passions. They are excitors, fomenters of disorder, sowers of revolts. And it is good that it should be so. God wishes it. He does not give His glory to any other. He does not give to oppressors, to the impious who despise at once humanity and the eternal laws — He does not give to them the key of hearts and wills. To be great before men, respected, obeyed, one must be little before God. But he who is little before God, also knows best how to accommodate himself to the narrowest exigencies of life, to inferior situations. In the last rank, he remains great as he is modest in the first; for he knows that there is only one form of greatness, that which the soul holds from God, and it is for this reason that he will never encroach, while commanding, on the sacred and inviolable rights of

others, and that, in humility, in servitude even, he preserves his nobility.

THESE are things that are verified in the history of peoples as in daily relations. It is said: We lack men. Prestige is departing. Respect diminishes. There is friction between the classes. All this comes from the same cause: we know not Him by whom we can do all things, obey and command. It is for this reason that we meet so many who are dissatisfied with their situation. The world is full of unrecognized geniuses, of great men who are not understood. Every one believes himself made to fulfill some more exalted function, and finds himself out of place in the little sphere that he occupies. He neglects to be faithful in little things, under the pretext that he is capable of accomplishing great ones. What does all this disquietude, horror, all this agitation of a multitude of men desiring to reach higher steps of the ladder, without having climbed the lower ones, prove? It only proves their incapacity to make anything out of what they have.

Let us distrust these ill-constituted minds and guard ourselves against entrusting to them that

which they envy for the purpose of replacing what they despise.

TO be worthy of the rank of officer or of general, something more is needed than to feel that one is misplaced in the rôle of corporal, and to show one's self negligent, arrogant and good-for-nothing. Those who do not know how to exercise any function whatsoever, with dignity and cheerfulness, provided that it be human and supportable, would display everywhere the same impotence. These are the bad poor men who would make bad rich men, bad servants who would make bad masters.

Alas! how many undisciplined subalterns are there not, to our greatest misfortune, whom one would not wish to serve a single day, if they were masters; how many of these masters, of little interest, who would be useless to us as servants, a race ever murmuring, nowhere at rest, whom the words of Saint Paul, inverted, would paint to the life: I have not learned, in whatsoever state I am in, therewith to be content; I do not know either how to be abased or how to abound: nowhere and in nothing am I instructed both to be full and to be

hungry; I do not know how to behave either in high places or in low places, I can do nothing, and He who strengtheneth, I know him 1 Cor. 12:10

THE meaning of the words of Saint Paul extends beyond the situation of fortune or of social rank. Let us endeavor to borrow from it still other rays to light our way. Here, for example, among many others, are two applications that can be made of these words: To know how to be young, to know how to be old; to know how to be happy, to know how to be unhappy.

What a pity it is to see a garden given over to a herd of swine that tear up the beds, trample on the seeds, wallow among the flowers, spoil the fruits! This is the spectacle that is offered our eyes every day by that beautiful and divine garden of Youth, when it is occupied, devastated, pillaged, by the lower instincts, the coarser appetites.

The dissipated do not know how to be young. No more do the young men anxious to get ahead. What! it is morning, drops of dew cling to every leaf, there are nests and beatings of wings in every thicket, and instead of opening your soul to the spring breezes, of being joyous, good for every-

thing that offers, of smiling and of singing under the sky that smiles on you, you remain cold and calculating; you constitute yourself the bird-catcher who tends his traps; you scheme and dream only of the best way of getting the best of your companions, of preparing your pedestal, of making yourself felt! Young diplomatist, I pity you for having this setting and installing your batteries in it, for not having been able to find a lovelier rôle in this Eden, than that of the spider that spreads its nets from flower to flower.

And they who walk yonder with bowed head, enveloped in a mantle of mist, returned from all before having seen anything, wrapped in their pessimism that they confuse with seriousness, or in their joyless rigidity that they take for virtue! And farther along, those who are full of pride, without respect for anybody, wiser than their father and mother, fallen from the sky with knowledge born in them. Do you call that Youth, that! None of these has ever known what it is to be young, brother of all that sprouts, springs, aspires and seeks; none of them has ever caught a glimpse of what such a situation admits of joy and pity, of hope and modesty, of vigilance, and high spirits.

AND when the years have passed over their youth that they have neither respected nor employed, and which they have not known how to enjoy, these men, incapable of being young, do not know how to be old. When the light becomes less intense, sound less loud, the blood less warm, the arm less firm; when the evening descends on the tired traveller, they do not know how to slacken their pace without a murmur, or to quit without complaint that feast to which they have done so little honour. One would say that they were the first to whom these things had happened. Age renders them sour, envious, full of discouragement. They go everywhere, speaking ill of that poor life which they have prized so little, disconcerting youth, railing at enthusiasm, carrying through till the end, till the final foundering (for such old age is a foundering) the same nefarious work.

OH! how much more beautiful in the mild light of evening, are those men who have known how to be young, who have loved life for what there is great and holy in it, given their strength for all that is worthy of being loved,

employed their days in the service of their brothers; who have known in their time how to laugh better than anybody, to strike a firmer blow than anybody, to work harder than anybody; who have wounded their feet on the stones of the highway, but who have never abandoned hope. Now, in the solitary path where they walk with diminished strength, they are happy in the happiness of others, glow at the contact of those who are beginning life, interest themselves in the future, forgetting their own distresses to show a fair face to the newcomers! They have kept in their heart the God of their youth, and he who has helped them to live will teach them to die. They see their sun sinking without regret, because they know one that will never set, and it is of them that it may be truthfully said:

*"My heart no longer hangs upon a ray of sunlight." **

TO know how to be happy, to know how to be unhappy. The current opinion is that it is easier to accustom one's self to happiness than to unhappiness. This does not mean that one knows how to bear the burden of easy

* Lamartine.

days more easily than that of days that are evil. It may even be asserted that there are few of us that know how to be happy. We do not easily bear happiness: it weakens us, impairs our strength, slowly causes us to lose a part of our qualities. It takes a high soul, constantly in contact with reality, maintained by the sentiment of the presence of God and purified by sharing the sufferings of others, not to melt away in felicity and to keep one's character intact. To many men the hours of severe trial have done more good than the pleasant hours. Happiness, then, constitutes a redoubtable ordeal.

BUT the question has often been envisaged under this aspect. There is another that is infinitely less known and that merits our attention. Here it is: We do not know how to be happy because we want confidence. One is so frankly unhappy, so completely desolated in certain cases. Why then cannot one be, as a sort of compensation, absolutely happy in other cases? Why these afterthoughts, these shadows, these presentiments that do more to spoil our happy days than luminous recollections or hopes console our days of misfortune? It is because man loses

confidence, security, the faculty of rejoicing. Certain misfortunes disturb him forever. You used to live in confidence, holding in your heart the calm necessary for advancing towards the future. But, like the malefactor at the corner of a wood, misfortune has fallen upon you, stricken you to the ground, mutilated you. Since, then, you no longer believe in the morrow, you can no longer taste pure joy. It seems to you that you have fallen under the governance of another God. You belong now to the old fatality, to some power jealous of the smiles of men and who makes you expiate every happiness. What a sad situation of mind, and how many myriads of men have had their lives forever devastated! I understand only too well this insecurity of a terror-stricken soul, and I sympathize with it more than with any other suffering. But if it is legitimate, explicable, if no one can be reproached with it, it involves nevertheless an injustice towards God. Even when life has ill-treated us, gashed us with hatchet-blows, we must do God this honour of warming ourselves in the ray that he sends us, of asserting our confidence in him, of maintaining our right to smile. For one who has been bruised, harshly tried, one of the most sublime

ways of serving God is to rejoice, be it only for an hour. The God who counts our sighs, will gather up our joy, and it will shine like a pure light as far as the heart of infinite compassion.

THESE reflections are drawing themselves out. I can, however, bring them to a close only by insisting one last time on this word: in all and for all, which says so many things impossible to enumerate and which concerns not only the vicissitudes of the outside world, but those of the inner life. We see clearly that in order to live it is necessary to be in touch with the source of life. It is because Christ dwelt in his soul that Saint Paul was strong. Whoever on this earth has a powerful spring of action, owes it to some holy love, to some high aspiration which puts him into contact with the spiritual world. He alone knows the charm of the strife, the fortifying savour of difficulties, to whom has been revealed the mysterious power of the invisible and beloved presences, thanks to which he is never or lost. How miserable is man when he has neither love, nor passion, nor faith, when he is reduced to becoming some-

thing in order to be destroyed, to increase in stature the better to taste the bitterness of death, and when he passes his life in ignorance of what life is!

BUT this light that sustains us sometimes veils its face, this inner desire becomes stilled, this heavenly breath that revives our souls and gives them life in the great combat, no longer makes itself felt. These are the days of spiritual misery, when it seems as if the armour, ordinarily invincible in spite of all obstacles, had been taken from us. This is the trial of trials. Then we must still say: I know how to suffer need. I admire Saint Paul in poverty, in prison, in hunger, in adversity; but when he glories in his weakness, when he knows how to renounce even feeling himself strong, courageous, visibly borne up by the spirit, for the purpose of consoling himself in the great inner distresses with these words: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness," then I should like to fall down on my knees, for I feel sure that it is God who is passing!

WE have a habit of speaking of Christian facts and of designating by this name historic events to which dates may be hinged. I do not see anything wrong in this. But access to these facts is difficult for a host of reasons. They take place outside of us, yonder. The time, the change in manners, the transformation of the world, modifications of thought, create between them and us distances more or less great. Happily for us there are Christian facts in our own time. What other eyes have seen, what far-off testimony affirms, is not all. The God of goodness has reserved to himself means for our salvation in every age, directly, by renewing about us and in our souls the great acts of salvation, and by permitting us to say, in another way than on the faith of historic documents: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me!

O CHRIST, the features of Thy mortal countenance are unknown to men; the painter who shows you to our eyes can do so only imperfectly. No one ever shall know the sound of Thy voice which yet dominates the ages, nor the brilliance of Thy eyes by which the infinite

goodness has shone into our shades. The books that should serve us to reconstruct Thy spiritual physiognomy and Thy life, leave us on many points in cruel incertitude. How many times has Thy gospel been dissipated in vapour at the hands of the wisdom of this world, or condensed into ice on the lips of those who call themselves Thy official mandatories. But Thou hast left us Thine image, Thy authentic signature, and, as it were, the sign of Thy power, in all those that live with Thy spirit, burn with Thy love, suffer with Thy pity, march with Thy hope. In them, Thou dost celebrate from age to age Thy victory over the world, when feeling the same God stir within them that wast in Thee, they receive the permanent proof of these words: He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. Ah! Thou, Great Living One, teach us to live, be rich in our misery, strong in our infirmity, and may the world that Thou hast so greatly loved keep thee, across its nights and its shipwrecks, until the eternal morning!

**YOU SHALL TREAD ON
SERPENTS**

READINGS

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress : my God ; in him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust : his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night ; nor for the arrow that flieth by day ; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness ; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand ; but it shall not come nigh thee. . . . There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder : the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Psalms : xci.

YOU SHALL TREAD ON SERPENTS

Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy : and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Luke, x, 19.

THESE words and their history in the world, are one of the proofs of what can become of a spiritual truth under the dominion of the letter. Before deriving edification from their normal meaning, we should then examine several cases where they cease to be beneficent and veracious.

It is far from our intention to wish to diminish their scope. That would be to attack the very root of the faith of all ages. That God is a rampart, that the man who fears him risks nothing, from scourges either of pestilence, or of slander; that the angels are commanded to bear him in their hands, is an assertion already familiar in the Old Alliance. The Psalms and the Proverbs contain

a series of passages, where absolute confidence in the protection of God finds an expression so strong, that the hearts of believers have never ceased, since that time, to draw inspiration from them. At bottom, Jesus, in the passage that we are considering, echoes the Old Testament, as he does often throughout his life and even on the cross. Christ, citing the prophets, making use of their own words for instruction, uttering even in his agony sighs and exclamations, in which we recognize the text of the Scriptures, affirms that the religious soul of humanity is one, and with respect to the particular question which occupies our attention, this unanimity of confidence is very comforting. It enables us to touch with our finger, as it were, what there is immutable and divine in faith.

It is not less true that a certain fashion of making use of these words has turned them against faith itself.

Already in the Old Testament their meaning became profoundly altered on certain lips. From this fact that God is the rampart of believers, and that in the shadow of his wings no harm could come to them, some concluded that the just should not suffer, or that, in any case, deliverance could

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never delay too long in coming. "Where is now thy God?" says the unbelieving and wicked wife of Job to her husband. As for Job's friends, they all concluded that he whom they had believed just, must have some defect, have committed some secret crime, of which his leprosy was the public punishment. And the author of the Book of Job, although placed at a point of view infinitely more elevated than that of wife and of friends, none the less caused the ordeal of his hero to cease before his death. The sick man is healed, his goods are returned to him, a new and numerous family comes to replace that which he has lost, and, for a few months of misery, there are accorded to him one hundred and forty years of unclouded happiness and of smiling old age. Alas! such reparations are scarcely of this world. How many tears has not this conception, that the just man should be happy, caused to flow from the eyes of believers! By what obscure paths has not poor humanity at once broken by ordeals, and tormented by the need of believing in eternal mercy, in eternal justice, had to drag itself through the centuries!

IN the time of the Prophets, above all during the exile, men learned to believe in the God of evil days, in the holy revelation that man spells out, as he weeps, in the mysterious book of sorrows. It appeared to the eyes of those who had suffered much and hoped much, that the lot of the children of God is often quite different from the old Jewish idyl, where men die, crowned with goods and glutted with days. In spite of this, the liberal sense of the promise, that evil cannot befall the just, continues to lead many minds astray.

What is called in the Gospel the "offence of the cross" is nothing else. The strongest argument of the Jews against Christ, is that He died on the infamous cross, and that the powerful arm of God did not intervene to deliver Him. Jesus was fully aware of the force of this religious superstition, profoundly rooted in the hearts of his contemporaries and even of his disciples. With what grief he must have said to them on the eve of his death: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." He knew that, for all minds whether hostile or friendly, to die as He was about to die, without an intervention of God, without a protest,

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without an external sign on his part, was equivalent to being abandoned, punished, reprov'd by God himself.

Where were at the last hour, those who could believe that this Crucified One, blanch'd and bleeding, hung between two thieves, had just delivered the supreme battle of a war in which he had conquer'd the world?

THE sublime lesson of things given on Calvary lets the light slowly in on our minds. Some few understood the immeasurable meaning of these words: "The just must suffer," and of these others: "The sins of the world are on the just." And yet, the old error always subsists. Is it not that that reappeared in the Middle Ages under the form of judgment of God? A crime is committed. Justice tries to discover the guilty one, and remains undecided. It has indeed laid its hand on many suspects, but material proofs are lacking. What is to be done in this embarrassment? Suspend judgment rather than to condemn an innocent man; that should be the only course to take. But it is not taken. Since human justice is powerless, make way for God's justice! It is God who

will pronounce upon it. He knows his own. Then the accused are exposed to grave dangers, are made to fight with wild deer, are delivered over to the flames, in the certain belief that if they are innocent, God will rescue them. And to think that men, Christians, have presided at these judgments, holding in their hands the image of the Crucified of Golgotha, without ever understanding that this cross was the loudest protest against the iniquity of what was called a judgment of God! But what is most horrible to think of, is that the victims of these blind judgments usually shared the faith of their contemporaries, and that, when they died in the ordeal, they felt upon them not only the reprobation of the crowd, of that thousand headed monster that devoured them with its eyes, but the reprobation of God himself. I do not know any more atrocious rending for human consciousness than this: to die for a holy cause, and, at the supreme moment of sacrifice, to suspect perhaps its righteousness, and to give up the ghost believing one's self accursed.

TREMBLING we read those old pages of an obscure and troubled history, and yet the same error persists in projecting its maleficent shadow over our life and our opinions. Every time a Christian lays stress upon the success of a work, of a man, or of a doctrine, to deduce from it that this work, this man, or this doctrine is beloved of God; every time it suffices for him to see a cause vanquished, to infer that this defeat is the finger of God manifested against this cause; every time he lets his conscience yield before an external obstacle, he commits an iniquity. At bottom, this kind of belief and of judgment leads right straight to the morality of success: *Everything that succeeds is good, everything that succumbs is bad.* What kind of atheism is worse than this religion?

AND this is how the words in which Scripture speaks to us of divine protection, words designed to fortify our courage, to be, as it were, a sure, stout staff to support our steps, become transformed into a club by which we are felled. And no one will ever be able to comment on a text like this: "You shall tread on serpents,"

without remembering first that many of the best, the purest, have been devoured by the serpents!

MUST we then abandon the promise of Christ and put off its accomplishment to the future life? Certainly, understood thus, it would still preserve a sense sufficiently broad and sufficiently consoling, and we shall come back to this, for we are of those who think that hearts can never be sufficiently fortified in the hope of eternal atonement. But it would be to misconceive the character of the words of Jesus to see in them exclusively or even by preference a promise referring to what lies beyond the grave. Their practical, circumstantial form announces an immediate meaning. It is evident that Christ wishes to encourage his disciples for their difficult mission, by promising them the help of God in the life that is. And it is here that there opens before us a broad ground of experience on which we are going to set foot. Jesus, when he says: "You shall tread on serpents," alludes to special immunities, to an extraordinary assistance which was often experienced before Him, by Him, and which continues to be experienced after Him. Jus-

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tice, goodness, truth, divine life in the world are in vain the great objects of persecution and the great vanquished, for they have none the less their days, their striking revenges, their triumphs, here, among us, in the bosom of doubt, of darkness, of suffering, and of evil. There is in them a hidden virtue which manifests itself by a thousand tokens, and of which it is enough once to have witnessed the mysterious effect to feel that no obstacle could resist it definitely.

OF this force of God we are going to ascertain the trace, in man's struggle against material dangers and against the dangers that come from human wickedness.

The material dangers first. And here permit us to make an allusion to certain allied facts. Nothing human ought to remain foreign to us. I am thinking of the naïve legends of times past that tell us of invulnerable heroes, men who passed their lives in the midst of dangers without ever having been harmed by them. An invisible rampart surrounded them and protected them in the accomplishment of their work. Humanity has ever wished that its benefactors should be safeguarded. Seeing them

more exposed than others, it has prayed for those heads consecrated by voluntary sacrifice. And it has found that its prayer coincided with a law that is at the bottom of things. For he who goes towards life and towards duty with a soul detached, fraternal, courageous, is watched over by God. Even the pagans felt confusedly that something divine animated them and placed them outside of ordinary conditions. This same kind of attestation has been confirmed, in every epoch and in all parts of the world, by a host of men attentive to what went on within themselves. And here I can appeal to personal experience, first in its humiliating aspect. There are days in life, are there not, when everything frightens you, when you walk with an ill-assured step. You lack confidence; the slightest obstacle makes you stumble, you could be drowned in a glass of water. Why this insecurity? The causes are numerous, but they lead back to the same source: The sentiment of the presence of God has diminished in our souls. Our preoccupations are level with the ground, our horizon is narrowed. Prisoners of our desires, of our lower thoughts, we run the risk, in our hiding place, of being destroyed by them, as certain celebrated

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prisoners have been devoured by rats. Let a material danger present itself in these conditions, a battle to give, a contagion to face, fatigue or an inclement climate to withstand, we go forth to face the forces of the adversary like demoralized soldiers, beaten in advance, because the enemy has allies in the citadel. When a man is surprised in certain conditions of moral disorder and of low tone, he is, as it were, prepared for his ruin.

ON the other hand, are there not, in life, periods when one feels himself visibly sustained, fortified and his breast, as it were, covered with a cuirass against danger? Why? Because a great love, a holy passion enflames you. Everything seems easy. While on certain days of hackneyed happiness you found yourself grown dull, you now feel in the very midst of a tempest a heart at rest, happy to go to your drug-gery, happy to run to the fire, happy to struggle against sickness. Nothing makes you afraid, nothing overcomes you! You see clearly in the midst of darkness; you cheerfully put up with hunger and thirst; the cold does not affect you, the microbe gets no hold upon you, and those who see you at

would be aware of supernatural powers under the
of a man. These are the experiences of which
Christ was thinking. And it is because they have
been experiences a thousand times and in all ages,
that old traditions, the Bible and history are full of
them.

LET us speak now of the dangers that come
from human wickedness. The serpent is
the symbol of calumny, of rampant cunning,
of hidden venom, of the lure that lurks for us
in the shade. And let us not forget that these serpents
have devoured many of the just. It is not less
true that we shall tread on them by the power of
God. It is not a promise merely; the facts are at
hand. More than once it has been demonstrated to
the serpents that their reign is ephemeral and their
power limited.

In the eyes of men there is no strife more unequal
than that of goodness, innocence, and
simplicity, against the united forces of evil. All the
arms and all the chances of this war seem on one
side; all the weakness on the other. And it is indeed
one of the great sad things of life to see and to submit
to the infernal work of falsehood and calumny.

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against their victims. But when we look at the bottom of the matter, the situation changes. In spite of its innumerable combinations, its improved machinery, its hideous triumphs, falsehood undertakes a work that is beyond human strength. It endeavours to make what is not, exist; consequently, it attempts the impossible. However enchanting the framework that it erects, it lacks one essential condition, equilibrium. The slightest impact of truth can, in a moment, make this haughty Babel fall like a house of cards. But, these meetings between falsehood which seems so great and truth which seems so small, abound in life. To see them, it is only necessary to know how to observe.

It is the same with the undertakings of calumny and of falsehood as with certain conspiracies. They need shade and absolute secrecy to come to anything. So long as these two conditions are fulfilled, all goes well. The plotters work under shelter, calculate their strokes, foresee everything, enjoy the success of their inventions, and rejoice already in the idea of falling on their prey. But here, sometimes, at the last moment, when everything is ready, a detail, a mere nothing goes wrong. Attention is aroused, the secret transpires, the indis-

pensable shade is pierced by a ray of light. Then the plot is uncovered, the veils are torn, the masks are snatched away, the implacable light of truth casts its beam upon the liars, upon their faces that are like those of reptiles that you crush with your heel, and those who contemplate these disasters of falsehood recall involuntarily the old device: *Afflavit Deus et dissipati sunt !*

The breath of God which disperses them, is not always a strong tempest, an irresistible hurricane of freedom and of generous indignation; it is sometimes a weak word, a childish word, as if the God of Truth had deemed it unworthy to employ great means.

“**Y**OU shall tread on serpents!’ These words have still a very direct application in the action of men of good-will for concord and peace. Discord and quarrels, rancours, all the evil feelings that enflame hearts against each other, are like so many serpents. Certain men cherish this ugly brood with affection. When they find a serpent’s egg anywhere, they pick it up, cover it and hatch it out. In their eyes, it would be a deplorable accident to let slip an occasion for disputing or for

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engendering a dispute. Dissensions and quarrels, big and little, are their element. If they have been able to rouse against one another the members of a family or of a church, the inhabitants of a city, the citizens of two adjoining countries, you see them rubbing their hands like merchants whose business prospers. And we must confess that this work of division and of dissension is often more flourishing in the world, and finds more apostles than the most congenial undertakings. Well, He who said to his disciples: "My peace I give unto you," conferred on them the power of destroying all these wicked serpents. It is an astonishing thing how much we can avoid friction, stifle bad desires, crush serpents in the egg when we allow ourselves to be guided by the spirit of peace. A man who is animated by it cannot appear in any society, cannot participate in any activity, without spreading about him, as it were, a contagious atmosphere of benevolence. By his mere presence sometimes, he prevents evil from unfolding. There are those who are born conquerors of serpents. They know what ought to be said and done to appease anger that is ready to flame forth; what is even more difficult, they succeed in extirpating from souls old hatreds, which

recall the tenacious life of certain reptiles, which, cut in pieces, continue to writhe upon the ground.

YOU shall tread on serpents!" This speech applies, again, to our victory over brute force. With its terrors and the prodigious array of its means, this force may be compared to those mythological dragons before which everything broke and fled, but which met their master, each in its turn, because they found themselves face to face with an invisible power upon which their arms could not take effect. And until the end of the world it will be the part of those who bear within themselves moral power, to furnish to the old dragon of material force the demonstration of his impotence. There are things in the world on which one can hammer, fire, gnaw, trample, in vain. They dull hammers and scourges, they are born again beneath the foot that has crushed them.

MORE abominable than the big serpents are the little ones. So I shall call the multitude of cares, troubles, miseries of every day, that assail us like a legion of scorpions. It is better to be eaten by a dragon at a single

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gulp, than to be gnawed piecemeal, by this swarming vermin, and to die slowly under its bites. Thank God, his force descends even to this! We have a Saviour who sympathizes with the sufferings of those whom an inglorious destiny has given them over to the power of petty tyrants and petty wickednesses. May he be blessed for having permitted his children to crush under foot not only the serpents, but also the scorpions, and for having opened to our souls inner places of refuge, where we can live in peace, in spite of both.

BUT to accomplish the work of which Christ speaks, to struggle against the serpents of falsehood and all their congeners, one must have within himself the spirit to which is promised victory over the world. Never let yourself be led into fighting for the right and for justice with the arms of the serpent. They are beneath your feet only because they are the powers of the under-world, and you are animated by the power above. Between them and you, it is a strife of the heavy things that crawl along the earth, against the wing that takes flight towards the skies. Do not wish you had their teeth, their poison, their re-

doubtable rings. Do not descend to their ground, for there they would be stronger than you. But do God the honour of believing that the good has more hope than the evil, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against His kingdom. When you march to the combat, let it not be with equivocal arms, or with the soul of a sheep being led to the slaughter, but with the armour of God, the consciousness of your strength, and saying to yourself *that there is a silent and eternal law that is the ally of all those that fight for justice.*

IF the visible world disappoints you, take refuge in that of faith. For we must now return to our first remark, and, after having spoken of the cases where we walk literally on serpents, extend the significance of these words, so as to include even those circumstances where the evil triumphs in human sight.

“YOU shall tread on serpents!” It is an eternal truth, whose aid should reach us even across temporal defeat. God, in fact, does not save man from evil and misfortune in all special cases; but he can save him *in spite of evil*

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and misfortune, and what we should hold for a certainty, is that it is better to be vanquished in God's cause than to triumph against Him. It is sweet to know that the work of evil, whatever may be its power and its ephemeral impudence, shall have its end; that its days are numbered, its sentence written; that all iniquity is only provisional, that every case remains open; it is sweet to the victims of fanaticism and of human cruelty to be able to appeal to the tribunal of God. Those who are crushed by the teeth of lions, those who are made feeble by misfortune, who are ground to pieces by the gear of tyrannical institutions, have succumbed in vain. For superficial eyes, these victims of life have been devoured by the serpents; but for him who knows how to see the root of things, they triumph on their knees; the voluntary sacrifice of their life is the purest victory of the spirit, and, in short, they tread on the serpents.

It has indeed been necessary that this high certitude, should in every age sustain those whom their conscience sent to destruction, permitting them to hope against all hope, and to march by faith in spite of the most formidable demonstrations of misfortune.

In the world of change and of anguish in which we live, a human life, strong, calm, assured, does not seem to us possible outside of this certitude. In God we have the security that nothing positively bad can happen to us. Neither the high things, nor the low things, neither life nor death can snatch us from His hand.

MAY we be permitted in closing, to recall as a beautiful illustration of these words of Christ, the old story of the prophet Daniel: The three young men in the fiery furnace?

When they had heated the furnace, cast the unhappy youths into the flames, and waited for them to be reduced to cinders, they saw to their stupefaction that the three young men were walking through the fire, untouched, and beside them a fourth who had the form of a son of the gods!

Do you think that this admirable page was written to terminate in an age like our own in what? — In a question of thermometrics?

No, it was written to tell us that, when men are in the furnace, they are not alone, but there is by them some one great and invincible. And this

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some one is there not only when the furnace spares its victim. After all, it is not then that he is most needed. We need him above all when the furnace has devoured its prey. And that is what the story of Daniel symbolizes and what the history of humanity realizes. Wherever an innocent man suffers, and wherever he perishes, in the isolation of long strifes or on the ruins of lives that have been sacrificed, appears that "Some one." He arises from the flame of the stakes; he pierces the walls of dungeons; he raises the stones of sepulchres. It is in Him and by Him that those who have died for justice are the most living of all. And if we have the joy of believing the words of Jesus: "You shall tread on serpents and over all the power of the enemy," it is because that, until the end of the world, we feel by us, in anguish, suffering, the supreme strife, the invisible companion who has the face of a son of the gods!

**I AM THE RESURRECTION AND
THE LIFE**

READINGS.

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Job : xix, 25, 26.

Because I live, ye shall live also. John : xiv, 19.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. John : iii, 36.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. John : xiv, 6.

For the wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans : vi, 23.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. Timothy : vi, 12.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Galatians : vi, 8.

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I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. John : xi, 25, 26.

MAN has received, with life, the desire to live and the obligation to live. But at the same time that life asserts itself within him, impels him and sustains him, death starts up before him. There is nothing more tragic than the meeting between man and death. Man has a feeling that he is here by a right that comes from a power higher than himself; he thirsts to become, to grow greater, to augment in himself that which is only beginning. He sucks the sap from everything, he drinks from the springs, he extends his domain. Death, on the other hand, says to man: you are not; it inter-

cepts his stores, it cuts him off from his sources, and under his very eyes hollows out the abyss of annihilation while it says to him: it is from thence that you come, it is there you will return. Since there are men, life struggles in them with death. It must be admitted that death has great advantages, and that its manifestations are impressed with a character of brutality and of obviousness that fills us with horror. By sickness, by iron, by fire, it attacks us and lays us low. When the remains of our poor life are laid in the earth, beneath its feet, it attacks them with implacable fury, tramples upon them, decomposes them, disperses them, just as the executioners used to scatter the ashes of the martyrs to the four winds of heaven. To such manifestations of our nothingness what answer can be made? What mouth will open before that granite jaw of the sepulchre which crunches all that is alive? For a long time humanity was silent before death and left it the last word. Man is too little to speak before the monster.

But an ally slowly came forth from the shade where our ignorance kept him concealed, and this ally is God. From the day when man received in his consciousness the testimony and revelation of

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Him who is at the bottom of all things, death had a spectator and a judge. Man doubtless, still did not believe in life in spite of death, but he felt, dying, that on his tomb there rested something besides death, his old enemy. He felt that some one saw him die, watched over his agony, received his last sigh, and he departed more peacefully, knowing that God was there. Possessed of this faith, man made another step, through the grace of his great ally. He could see death itself enveloped in the eternal will and say to himself as he closed his eyes: Lord, let it happen to me according to Thy will; I go to sleep in Thy arms, and give everything into Thy hands, O guardian who never sleepest. Once we had arrived at this point, it could be said that the human soul had found a fortress whence it could defy death. Timid at first, then more accentuated, the assurance that we should not altogether die, that God would receive us, that He would draw us out from this night, would wake us from this slumber, manifested itself among the believers of the Old Alliance, and issued at last into the radiant faith in eternal life as it is affirmed and is triumphant in the Gospel. The Gospel may, in fact, be called the religion of Life. Since

that time, faith in Life, under various forms, has never become entirely extinct. It has only experienced its ups and downs. It is of the greatest interest for every one to take account of the causes that increase or diminish our faith in life.

IT must be admitted that if firm belief in survival has sometimes seemed to be eclipsed, this is due primarily to the abuses that have been made of it. Every one knows that it has had its exploiters. Shameful speculations upon the aspect of what lies beyond the tomb, have cast discredit upon all that pertains to it. When some, sceptics at bottom, sell heaven, and others try to buy it; when the hope of future reward or fear of punishment replaces in hearts the love of God and of men, it ought not to astonish us that the edifice is worm-eaten, and cracks everywhere.

The gross materialism of certain beliefs, their form too intimately allied to intellectual conceptions that have disappeared, results often also in compromising faith itself. I hasten to say that we must here carefully distinguish between unhealthy superstitions and simple and naïve representations of eternal hope. The most naïve hope is worth

more and approaches infinitely closer to reality, than the most apparently rational negation. At bottom, every form in which man envelops his faith, is fragile like himself, and there is no great difference between what we call the most spiritual religion and that of the lowly and of children. Both derive their only value from their sincerity and from the goodness of the Father who, alone, knows how to estimate them. — So much said, we cannot carefully enough guard ourselves against confusing faith with what serves us as an envelop for it, if we wish to keep from falling into that fanaticism which holds in contempt the faith of others, and if we wish to be able to keep our convictions in the midst of the modifications of human thought and knowledge.

ANOTHER cause of the diminution of eternal hope, is the *weariness of living* that has taken possession of many of our contemporaries. Life, for them, is a burden, they bear it as they would suffering. How can we ardently hope and desire the continuation of what wearies us and fills us with horror? Hope, in this case, is that it will come to a close soon and for-

ever, that an eternal and dreamless sleep will relieve us of this nightmare of a life. There are men to whom you would accord in vain the power of waking the dead; they would answer you: let them sleep, it is infinitely better so!

What does this prove, if not that such living beings have the radical malady, that which consists in being at variance with the very source of life? Their inverted belief, their thirst for nothingness is a proof of the artificial, abnormal life that we are leading. Such a life disgusts us with life, and, for other reasons, it deserves to disappear.

NONE of these causes of the weakening of the hope of eternity is comparable in importance to that which results from the lowering of the moral life, from the depression of the interior level. Faith has obscure bases without which it cannot develop. Purity of life, simplicity of heart, a certain atmosphere and a certain light are indispensable to it. What we are, and the way in which we live is reflected in what we believe. Whoever buries himself in dust comes in the end to believe only in dust. You have heard of those beings who have lost their sight and engen-

dered blind descendants, through living in the darkness of caves. It is impossible to imagine the quality of air and of light in which those men vegetate, for whom living is being able to eat, drink, play and work with their hands or their brain for the purpose of procuring raiment, food, pleasure or a few gratifications for their ambition. Why should it astonish us that these spiritual troglodytes should end by forgetting the light of day! They only change tombs when you bear them to the cemetery, and belief in eternal life can neither sprout nor increase in their souls.

Alas! why do so many Christians resemble them? For we must not be deceived on this point. Words, here, and formulas have nothing to do with the matter, it is the thing that counts.

DO you believe in eternal life? — You answer yes, and you even speak in terms that prove you are familiar with the questions involved. This is the smallest part of the matter, my brother. To say that you believe in eternal life, to assert it squarely, to rest your arguments upon the holy Scriptures, is an excellent beginning, but it may be very dangerous. — Dan-

gerous? Why? Because it is always a bad thing to satisfy yourself with words and to imagine that you possess what in reality you lack. Dangerous for others also. Nothing compromises faith in eternal life more in the public mind than a man who has no other proofs than words for the declaration of what he believes. It is concluded that it is an inconsequential formality like so many others. You say that you believe in eternal life. Perhaps it was necessary for you to say so. I should have preferred that it might be perceived without your saying so, and in any event, once you have said it, it is necessary that your actions should confirm it. I admit that this argument is too often wanting. What a blow for faith in immortality is that lower realism of the greater part of those who profess to believe in it! With what are we most occupied? Look at the question straight in the face; we must not fear to assure ourselves of the solidity and authenticity of what must carry the weight of the whole edifice. With what are we most occupied? Among our contemporaries, who, then, set most store by wealth, pleasures, unjust privileges, puerile distinctions, who then displays the smallest, most hide-bound, the narrowest mind? The material-

ists? the atheists? — No. We may fairly even be astonished that many of them live as if they had souls. Christians, on the contrary, live almost like every one else, and if some are distinguished among them, it is by love of perishable goods, cleverness in procuring them, rabidness in defending them. Do you really believe that the cultivation of comfort, pride of caste, the pharisaical spirit, are the steps of the ladder by which one climbs from the dust to the stars and by which freedom from death is accomplished step by step?

THERE is a way of living that is a negation of eternal life. We are immersed in it.

Here, in the midst of the difficulties of this age, is the gravest. When the sense of the eternal is lost, that mainspring is relaxed which we need in order to organize mortal life. For, to live his life, man needs a horizon. He must be able, from the black furrow where he toils and bows his head, to raise his eyes towards the heights whence comes aid. So soon as the opening on the infinite becomes closed, and men are prisoners of their passions, of their appetites, of their vanities or of their formulas, symptoms of asphyxia

manifest themselves in every region. Action loses its impulsiveness, religion becomes petrified, poetry fades, art becomes debased, hope dies.

WE need to learn the true life, that of which Christ has said: I am the life. It is the higher life. In each of us, there are two parts, God's part and that which belongs to death. To reach the eternal, we must learn to live in God's part. This is not ordinarily the case. We delight in the ephemeral, in the vain surfaces; we call that "I," which is only the lower "I." We install ourselves in the mediocre, the base, in what is wicked, narrow. We barricade ourselves in egoism, sensuality, petty justice, and we defend against all what we call our dignity and our goods, and which are only a stone about our neck, a ball at our ankle. Thus, man works for death. He makes himself its purveyor, he cultivates that which must perish. To live the higher life, we must begin by renouncing this "I." We must learn to regard as a liberator, the death that suppresses it. What would become of the world without perpetual purification by death? If all old wickednesses, all the ancient hates, all the old marshes of

human pollution were never cleaned out, or ventilated or flooded; if one were permitted to be infamous, hypocritical, murderous, fanatical, a liar, and to be these forever; a miser, and keep one's treasure eternally; a tyrant, and oppress one's victims eternally, earth would be a hell, no other would be needed. But we have death — death, which like a fire, makes wholesome, purifies, consumes the impurities, tries out everything, and in its crucible, separates what is eternal from what is of only a day's duration. Under this aspect, whatever ill it does us, we should love death, as we love bitter but beneficent remedies.

This is not a concession made to annihilation, an abdication. No, the real name for this is getting rid of encumbering burdens, that we may march the better to battle. And he who renounces this dangerous baggage, acquires the power of fighting against death, the enemy. For death is an enemy, when it wishes to prove something against the spirit, conscience, justice, against the image of God which is in us, and, why not assert it joyously, against God who is in us. It is to God that our soul is suspended with all that there is holy and noble in it. If it could perish, God would be injured. The

loss of one man would be the defeat of God. The source of all protests against annihilation, of the invincible hope that animates humanity, of the superhuman courage that feeble beings, oppressed, lost before superior forces, guard until death, the source of all acts and of all forms by which faith in eternal life has been made manifest — this source is here: it is in God that we have life.

Christ possesses it, he communicates it, and this does not operate exclusively by the historic channel of a continuous tradition, of a diffused life. It takes place to-day, as then, as always, by the direct cohesion between the soul and God. Other means are created only that they may the better awaken and strengthen this one.

LIFE in God, the Christian life, the true life and the life eternal, these are all one, joined together like the links of a chain. Every pure and normal manifestation of this present life ought to reveal the permanent reality which is concealed under our visible existences, and prepare us thus to live in the invisible, to grasp that reality of which all that is seen, that is felt, that falls under the domain of the senses, is only the

fragile symbol. It is for this reason that an act of the spiritual life even if it is of only a day's, an hour's duration, should nevertheless have pre-eminence over the most durable and most gigantic displays of mechanical forces. Eternity does not consist in the number of centuries, but in things themselves and their inner value. The blow of a bludgeon proves nothing against unarmed reason; a cannon shot proves nothing against vanquished justice, and death proves nothing against the spirit. Destruction has never established the superiority of the destroyer over what he destroys. The most fragile fragment of ideal beauty that brutal hands break is none the less of the domain of what endures. If man could only catch one glimpse, if he could once suspect what the least act, the least intention of pure goodness, contains of surpassing being and victorious reality, he would see the liberating Word written in characters of fire even in the insolent triumphs of hatred, of tyranny, of evil in all its forms.

CHRIST has not said: I shall give life to those who believe in Me, but: whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die; and He himself did not consider eternal life as a sort of posthumous recompense; He has spoken of it as of a conquest that is to be gained from this very moment, and that nothing can take away from us. We do not hear Him say: I formerly possessed life when I was with the Father, and this life will be given back to Me when certain mysterious events shall be accomplished in My person. But just as He was, living the human life, He calls Himself the resurrection and the life, asserting thus the insoluble bond, the absolute continuity between what we are and what we shall be. If we add to this declaration that in which Christ says: "Abide in me and I in you," and so many others that establish the fact of a higher life, imperishable, divine, possible in us from the very present, we are led to understand that eternal life is not reserved for us in some distant star, after a long time has elapsed, or a long annihilation, but that we begin to live in it now. God in us — that is the beginning of eternal life, and its accomplishment is that He dwells in us more and more. We belong to Him in

this visible existence and under these known forms; we shall remain His in the invisible existence and under those forms that remain unknown to us.

Our fathers said, when one of their kinsfolk died: he has gone to God. But as God is everywhere, and as it is in Him that we have life, movement, being, going to God is not making a great journey, since He is nearer to us than we are ourselves. If man knew how near God is, he would be forever delivered from the anguish, the fear, from the shudder induced by the final shades, and he could say with perfect joy in the destruction of his physical being: Oh grave, where is thy sting, oh death, where is thy victory? Eternal life, in the Gospel, is rather an object of experience than of belief. — Under this form, the energy that it infuses into action is superior to that which is procured by the liveliest hope. Its power of consolation is, therefore, increased.

IT is in God that we have life. In Him also we remain united with those whom we have lost. Both they and we are in the hands of the Father, and it becomes possible for us to believe not only that we shall see them again, but in some-

thing of which the happiest meeting is but a feeble image. Our eyes, our ears, all our organs of relation are only imperfect means whereby we succeed in establishing, between ourselves and those whom we love, a contact that is always relative. Ceaseless separation subsists. Dispersal, tearing asunder, division, this the lot of temporal life. We aspire to union, without ever being able to attain to it. But then we shall be one, as God will be one with us, and all in all. It will be the accomplishment of that sacred and sublime desire for union that nothing mortal satisfies, and that man carries at the bottom of his heart like a divine stranger filled with longing for the fatherland.

MY brothers, this age is overwhelmed by the sentiment of its nothingness. It seems as if the very greatness of its works, collapsing upon it, increased the extent of its shipwreck. Like decaying races we no longer beget for anything but death. Courage to hope abandons us. Death grows ceaselessly before our eyes. The most of us believe that it is death that is the Alpha and Omega, that to it belongs the kingdom, the power and the glory. Severed from the

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life-giving stream that flows down from the immortal heights, we fall by the wayside as Ishmael, son of the Egyptian Hagar, fell in the desert. Then when will the angel of God show us the hidden spring, that is close by us, and that no one suspects? Thou who hast trod upon our dust, traversed our nights, Thou who hast lain down with us in the tomb that it might be the less dark, sweet victim of Calvary, man of sorrow, ineffable grandeur of whom our souls catch glimpses across the humble form of religious symbols, living and eternal! come and speak to us the words of life. Sound the awakening in our torpor and our lassitude, sound the morning gun through our prisons and our tombs, and let what is divine in us leap up at it and rise in holy insurrection against death and all its confederates, for life and all its allies.

ABIDE WITH US

READINGS

A : Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. II Kings : ii, 4.

Forsake me not, O Lord : O my God, be not far from me. Psalms : xxxviii, 21.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep : seek thy servant. Psalms : cxix, 176.

Cast me not in the time of old age ; forsake me not when my strength faileth. Psalms : lxxi, 9.

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. Ruth : i, 16, 17.

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. Isaiah : liv, 10.

Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Matthew : xxviii, 20.

ABIDE WITH US

Tarry ye here, and watch with me. Matthew : xxvi, 38.

Abide with us : for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. Luke : xxiv, 29.

THAT obscure pilgrims with restless souls should say to Him whose presence replaces all else with them: Abide with us, is conceivable.

But there is something surprising in seeing Him who was accustomed to say: "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me," seek, with an insistence that borders on supplication, the contact and presence of disciples infinitely inferior to Him. The bringing together of these two texts casts a very bright light on that law of mutual aid, of brotherly exchange of which God has made the necessity of our existence. By the holy and eternal will, the greatest have need of the smallest, as the smallest have need of the greatest.

IT is the fate of those whom some particular mission have made great, to be alone. Powerful and solitary, that is their lot. They are our chiefs, our ramparts, our shelters. We follow their steps, we grasp their hands. Their fire warms us, their light lightens us. But who then guides them, shelters them, hides them under the shadow of his wings? To whom do they go to get that which they give? Does their strength never give out? When they fall, who lifts them up? When they weep, who consoles them? Can we do nothing for those who give us everything? This is something that almost no one thinks to ask himself. Do we ask whence the spring gets its crystal water, the sun its ray?

In these questions we touch upon the most sorrowful secret of those lives that God has marked with a divine signet. And with this secret, the night of Gethsemane brings us face to face. It is perhaps more poignant here than anywhere else. That a being so filled with God that he can say: "I and my father are one," should come to entreat of men, this is not only the sign of a superhuman sorrow, it is a proof that there is, without doubt, in us something great and mysterious, a power to console and

to assist, unknown to ourselves, and of which it would be impossible to hold too sublime an idea, since the Son of Man, the great captain of the battles of God, has appealed to it. Is it not an encouraging revelation to hear it said: Oh man, creature wandering and lost, over whom every tempest passes, there is in thy deepest depths, in that intimate centre where thy being is joined to God, a pure and salutary spring at which the man of sorrows asked to drink in an awful hour? When the heavens are veiled above our heads, it is by this that there is established contact with the Eternal.

IF Jesus felt at certain moments, the need of seeking in a friendly presence a form of help from God, how will it be with us, infant souls still ill-established? Tarry ye here and watch with me, is our cry to every one in the evenings of sorrow.

I think first of the insomnia of the nights of agony and suffering, that are one of the most painful ordeals of this earth.

Night is a friend when it brings sleep. There are so many questions for which the best solution is to go to sleep. Sleep is an oasis in the fiery deserts:

When he sleeps, the prisoner is free, the sick is healed, the child from home feels close around him his mother's arms. Among the gifts of God, the reparative forces, sleep holds a place in the first rank. Those who enjoy it when it is peaceful and strength-giving do not know with what a treasure they are blessed. To judge fully of it, they must have known insomnia, distressing, disconcerting insomnia, that changes the face of things and deranges the calm measure that enables us to appraise them; the insomnia in which everything, even the idea of time, floats and becomes deformed.

For it, an hour is no longer an hour; an hour is a century and a night drags itself out like an eternity. Slowly, man feels himself descending to the bottom of a gulf, so deep that he can no longer see the mouth. And in these petrified moments, in this horrible fixity of stagnant hours, thought acquires a feverish activity. Its images follow and drive each other away, and all, as they pass, hurl defiance at us. What seems natural by day, in the full poise of judgment, becomes altered, acquires alarming proportions. The world takes on in our eyes the grey colours of a nightmare.

We are given over to phantoms, a more miserable fate than being thrown to wild beasts.

And to think that there are certain days when all life is invaded by these phantoms, when in the full midday, we have lost the normal sense and just impression of things; broken by a great grief, blinded, shaken by a temptation too great for our strength, miserably wounded in our whole being, it seems to us that hostile powers, powers of the shades, take the upper hand and carry us away. To crown our sadness, the heavens seem to close in upon us, God seems far off. Not only is it night; but night without stars! I say no more of these moments when the strongest-hearted tremble. Those who have suffered them know them only too well. The best believers may travel this road.

It is then that we learn to feel the meaning of the presence of a beloved and trusted being, in whom we can have confidence, to whom we say: Abide with me.

We do not say this to the first comer. Christ in the Garden of Olivet, made a choice. He loved all His disciples, even him who was going to betray Him with a kiss; but He availed himself of a sacred right in choosing those who were nearest to His

heart. And His great sorrow came from the fact that even these, even while tarrying there, were far from Him. For it is not enough to be present, ready, within reach of hand, it is necessary to be there with all one's soul. And that is what is not given to every one. Man flees sorrow. When he comes across serious things or things that frighten him, his first impulse is to go away. You know this temptation at once so common and so cowardly: to seek to get away from those who suffer. There is mode of speech which is current in certain countries, and which is employed when a great misfortune befalls a family. They say: *I should rather not know them*. This is atrocious, but it is human.

Often circumstances prevent you from absenting yourselves. Ties of blood or propriety detain you, but you remain mechanically: That is the worst of absences. Your presence only brings into clearer relief all that separates you from the unhappy brother who suffers by your side. Oh the inner distances, the deep dug abysses between men who live under the same roof, sleep in the same room, eat at the same table! They are there side by side, their roads lie parallel, they breathe the same

air, and their hearts are farther apart than the pale stars are from the earth.

But you are nei her insensible nor egoists, nor incapable of feeling what is passing in others. Your fear is not in remaining, but in knowing what to say. Do not worry so much about that. That is not the important thing. Not that words are useless and without power. If there are evil words that fasten in the heart like poisoned arrows, there are also good ones! Words like those beneficent substances with which the sick are inoculated, and that go coursing through the veins, to combat everywhere deadly fermentations. There are words that heal, that reassure, that relieve, that open outlets, clear horizons, restore life. But words are not everything. And in the first place, not everybody knows how to say things. Often also, any word, even the best, is powerless, because he to whom it is addressed, no longer comprehends. Sickness, grief, too lively suffering, too violent an inner agitation, render him incapable of following reasoning. Then, there are situations where the most eloquent become mute, because events close their mouth, and, quite sincerely, they no longer know what to say.

THIS is no reason for going away: quite the contrary! Where the reign of intelligible speech ends, there the power of God and of mercy does not end. If you can say nothing, keep still, but stay! Do the poor beasts know how to speak, to construct a chain of reasoning, to marshal proofs, to expound doctrines, to plead motives? No. However, when we suffer, and when they come and lie down beside us, fixing their great dumb eyes upon our eyes, this produces its effect. Who shall ever say how much courage and consolation the presence of a being obscure, but faithful, who shares our dangers and does not wish to be separated from us, has been able to bring to our grief-stricken hearts! And who tells that He who has sent the prophets, the apostles, the souls of the flaming word, cannot choose a bird, a dog, the humblest of his creatures, to carry to His unhappy children a message of hope? Would the Goodness who makes use of such lowly instruments, be powerless to make use of you alone? Abide then, and if your wisdom is no longer anything but an outworn armor, if the eyes of your faith see distress in the night of horror that has fallen, if your voice no longer pierces the shades, abide

there! Abide like a landmark, with all your resolution, with an absolute sympathy, place yourself beneath the burden with him whom it is crushing. Christ did not say to the apostles: Speak to Me. He only asked them to tarry, to watch with Him, in order that He might know that they were there, ready. They who love do not need words, Their souls mingle in their silence as well. The deeper silences are, the more do they contain of mysterious exchanges. The presence of a friendly being is a whole world of revelations. Between His spirit and ours, discreet messengers take their way back and forth by invisible roads. . . . Tarry and keep still: the God who surpasses all intelligence and sets at defiance all speech, the God of silence will do the rest.

IT is said, in the Old Testament, that a prophet who had seen God neither in the whirlwind nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, felt Him pass in a soft and gentle breeze. Is not that a symbol, as it were, of the way in which God has come to us in Jesus? By a very natural transition, the different motives we may have for saying to our fellows: abide with us, lead us then to

Christ. Never, through the mouth of any other messenger, little or great, has the eternal goodness said to us more sweetly: I am there. Jesus is God within us. In the splendours of creation, as in its unchained forces, God manifests Himself, but He is external, and He may seem far away. Is He not also far off, when we believe in Him in that majestic and glorious form that places Him on an immovable throne, in accessible light, surrounded by power and happiness? To gaze from the bottom of our shadows towards this radiant divinity, is still without doubt a precious advantage. But can we help thinking: To Him belongs life, to us death; to Him belongs joy, to us tears; to Him victory, to us strifes, defeats, cruel incertitudes. Is not such a God too Olympian? Does He not preside at too high an elevation and in a calm too ideal for our tormented destinies? And could not the human heart in its most legitimate nature, find this grandeur too easy, and this royalty too superficial? Something tells us that, in the suffering that gathers itself together and wishes to hope, in the doubt that searches, gropes its way, slowly achieving its more perfect lights, there is more grandeur than in tranquil possession and cloudless serenity. Human mis-

ery is more touching than the beatitude of the angels. What we need, as much for the direct help that we hope from Him as for the love and adoration that we owe to Him, is a God *who abides with us*. Not only ought He see things from on high, but He ought also to see them from below. Not only ought He see them, but He ought to be them. Human faith needs to say to Him: Though I climb up to heaven, Thou art there; though I go down into the grave, Thou art there also. We need a God who weeps with our tears, is distressed by our agonies, bends under our burdens, a God who suffers. This God takes the form of a man, bows down to us who cannot mount to Him. This is the God of the Gospel, He who visited us in Christ; and that is why the Crucified One of Calvary has more hold on wounded hearts, more consolatory power, than all that the human mind can conceive most transcendent in the way of divinity. What every pilgrim on the unstable roads of earth, should wish for, is that he may be able to keep by him that companion, who translates the invisible truth of the divine realities into human words, into familiar sentiments, into tangible acts, and who gives the power of speaking eternal things to actions, to

humble duties, to sadness, as well as to the joys of eternal life.

The great consolation in all the events of existence is that Christ has travelled this way, showing us here the footsteps of God. There are no more lost paths, forgotten corners, no longer is there any desolate gulf. In misfortune even, in death, in the jaws of the monster, God through Him has said: Fear not, I am with thee. To perceive this is the great thing, the only thing that is necessary. If only this remains with you, nothing is lost!

When you were children, you were afraid of the dark, you trembled before strange forms that were clad in shadows and that filled your young imagination with dread. And you said to your mother: stay with me. With her by your side, the night no longer had anything hostile. Her reassuring presence conciliated the shadows themselves, charmed away all their hostility, tamed the evil genii.

We remain children all our lives, unarmed and trembling before the unknown forces to which we are abandoned in this world. We need this maternal presence that stills the floods, the cries of

menace, the doubts, everything that provokes the sensation of insecurity.

Ever the evening will fall upon our paths, ever, for whomsoever is a man, the hour will come when the light of day bids us farewell, when the lights of reason no longer suffice, when our strength leaves us, when the firmest and clearest-sighted confesses that he no longer knows where he is. Ever, the old sin, the ancient stain will follow us like a shadow; ever, misery and misfortune lie in wait for us; ever, death will rejoin us. The face of this world changes, but at bottom, how little life has changed! Since our enemies remain, do not abandon us, friendly power! Since evil endures, endure also, Thou who hast been before evil, who hast conquered evil, and who wilt be when it is no more!

Abide with us, elemental goodness, who hopest all and knowest how to pardon all; abide with us, love for which nothing is difficult; peace divine in the midst of tempests, abide with us. Abide with us, invincible courage of the holy battles. When we are struggling with temptations, do not abandon us; when sin shall have conquered us, do not cast us off, abide with us! When we shall weep on the tombs, abide with us; he over whom thou watch-

est, finds again that which he has lost. When he shall enter into death, abide with us: he who gives Thee his hand has no longer any fear of the shadows.

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